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Agency and its Discontents: Nationalism and Gender in the Work of Pakistani Women

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*Agency and its Discontents: Nationalism and Gender in the Work of Pakistani Women
Writers, 1947-2005*

Abu-Bakar Ali

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

King's College London

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the fraught intersections between gender and the nationalist imaginary in the work of Pakistani women writers, from the period of the country's inception in 1947 to more contemporary narrative treatments of the subject and its various tropes.

The central concern is how these complex literary interventions figure across a hegemonic nationalist historiography which refuses to grant them a representational space. My project views the literary practice of these women authors in terms of what is at stake when their varied and diverse gendered contributions compel Pakistani nationalist discourse to re-evaluate its own precarious ideological foundations. These writers and the repressed histories their texts are a repository for, negotiate a tenuous path between the potentially regenerative power of an independent, postcolonial future and their position as marginalised silence within this supposedly 'inclusive' reality.

The project addresses its main research questions in an Introduction and four chapters. The first section unpacks how the work of authors such as Khadija Mastoor and Hijab Imtiaz Ali has been elided across various postcolonial discourses. In Chapter 1 I examine the various routes to agency that have been theorised by feminists in the postcolonial context and how this can be applied to the work of Pakistani writers, Farkhanda Lodhi and A.R. Khatun. These methodologies are tested

against the bloody Partitioning of the Indian sub-continent in the second chapter, necessitating a rethink of the possibilities of agency represented by the female body when it is under the threat of violence and erasure. My penultimate chapter focuses on the seemingly banal, but immensely popular genre of romance literature in Pakistan, on which very little research has been conducted. To this end I have chosen Qaisra Shahraz's romance epic, *The Holy Woman*. The final chapter explores tropes of migration and return in the diasporic imaginary of contemporary Pakistani women writers, Bapsi Sidhwa, Kamila Shamsie and Uzma Aslam Khan and their novels *An American Brat*, *Kartography* and *Trespassing* respectively.

INTRODUCTION

NATION, GENDER AND THE (PAKISTANI) POSTCOLONIAL QUESTION

I said impatiently, ‘You always look for tidy surfaces and never peep into dark corners. That’s why you’re so proud of the depth of your love. But unfortunately Zulfie, I’m obsessed with discriminating between the genuine and the fictitious. It’s that preoccupation of mine that whispers to me: Within the calm surface of your sea of love there are underwater predators.’¹

Pakistani Women Writers in Discourse, Practice and History

This thesis focuses on exploring the representation of feminist agency in writing by Pakistani women. An endeavour of this kind poses several challenges. The work of these often neglected writers not only engenders unease in historical accounts of Pakistan’s rise to nationhood. It also intervenes tenuously in those theoretical, postcolonial discourses which would perhaps claim to be best positioned to illuminate its various complexities. The objective of this critical inquiry into this body of writing does not, therefore, simply involve textual recuperation. It also has to be directed at how difficult questions of gender, nation and representation are being negotiated in the work of these women and how these are located theoretically. These texts and the questions about gender that they raise, necessarily open up a dialogue between materialist and postmodern frameworks that conflict within postcolonial studies. They complicate the binary approach of such theoretical paradigms. Furthermore, Pakistan

¹ Hijab Imtiaz Ali, ‘Tempest in Autumn’, in *Kahani: Short Stories by Pakistani Women*, ed. by Aamer Hussein (London: Saqi, 2005), pp.47-57 (p.53). Subsequent references to the anthology are within the main body of the thesis in parenthesis and are from this edition.

itself, much less the literature of its marginalised women writers, can be seen as a theoretical blind-spot.

The emphasis of this study does not necessarily involve revealing the ‘dark corners’ that seek to be recognised by the ‘tidy surfaces’ which continuously disavow them. Instead, it demands a focus on a disruptive trope in both the historical and literary representation of Pakistani nationalism in its myriad manifestations, and the wider debates that inform contemporary postcolonial discourse. The project calls not simply for the recuperation of a ‘lost’ or ‘neglected’ canon as such, but a nuanced investigation into what is at stake in such a recuperation, how it is occurring and what is being produced in the process. The foregrounding of ‘South Asian’ literature in postcolonial studies across ‘Western’ academic discourse is itself underpinned by a restorative logic. And yet Pakistani women writers and their work can be seen as highlighting the flaws in such a retrieval, where they are geographically elided and geopolitically ignored. This thesis aims to evaluate the various ways gendered representation in the practice of these authors engages with Pakistani nationalism at seminal points in the country’s history. Their work stands between the call for a recognition of nationalism as imperative to a unified, holistic postcolonial subjectivity, and those discourses that repudiate the political rationale of the subject as divisive, an essentialist construct employed to justify the worst excesses of nationalist politics. What is deemed ‘worthy’ of intellectual enquiry in the South Asian literary and academic framework is shaped by these conflicting positions. The politics of gender in the work of Pakistani women writers necessitates renewed attention to postcoloniality itself. In the jostling for the theoretical high-ground, the ‘underwater monsters’ still remain, pointing perhaps to the need for an approach that recuperates, without losing sight of what may be at risk in the methodologies of recuperation.

‘South Asia’ and Pakistan

In many ways, the above quotation from Hijab Imtiaz Ali’s ‘A Tempest in Autumn’ undermines the ‘tidy surfaces’ of postcolonial discourse, practice and historiography. As a Pakistani woman writer, her work represents a schism in what has increasingly become a canon of iconic South Asian literature. Ali’s literary practice is a jarring intervention in this textual field and raises several interesting questions, which are rooted in more than a simple interrogation of the canon’s politics. The term ‘South Asian’ refers to a discrete set of texts by authors selected, it seems, for the ways in which their work might support a specific theorising of the postcolonial condition. Yet significantly, the category also highlights a powerful symbiosis between the worlds of academia and globalised, commercial publishing. Specific representations of ‘South Asia’ are therefore commodified, having been reified in lecture theatres. A project such as this proves extremely disconcerting as ‘South Asian’ postcolonial discourse is forced to confront exactly how inclusive it really is. The results are not encouraging. Notwithstanding the absence of reference to literature by Pakistani women, the country itself- as an historical and political entity of postcolonial ‘South Asia’- appears to have been airbrushed out of any critique of post-Partition literature. Such an elision ranges from general theoretical entries exploring postcolonialism and its texts, to more specific material which seeks to locate this in different feminist or historical contexts. In the former area, it is notable that Pakistan as a geographical or literary presence is barely a footnote in the work of seminal critics such as Gayatri Spivak or Homi Bhabha. This is especially ironic in Spivak’s case, given that the ‘history’ of the Indian sub-continent, and its pre and

postcolonial future, forms the basis for much of the critic's deconstruction of the postcolonial canon, its theoretical positions and the literatures that represent these positions. Some other selected examples include *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology* (2001), which affords a passing reference to Pakistan when providing a overview of 'South Asian' history.² The texts employed by the critiques in the anthology however, foreground an exclusively Indian representation of this 'history'. A similar theme is apparent in both Bart Moore-Gilbert's *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (1997)³ and *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (1996), edited by Padmini Mongia.⁴ In a more specific way, *Reading the "New" Literatures in a Postcolonial Era* (1996) is interesting yet unfortunately symptomatic of the way 'South Asia' has been mapped in postcolonial discourse.⁵ Here, the 'New' literatures reach as far as Bengal if not necessarily Bangladesh. There are however, some notable exceptions. *Into the Nineties: Post-Colonial Women's Writing* showcases short stories by Bapsi Sidhwa, thereby at least acknowledging not only postcolonial literature from Pakistan, but the work of one of its more prominent women writers.⁶ The excellent *The Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies* (2000) is also an intelligent, nuanced critical study of the way certain national literatures have

² *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology*, ed. by Gregory Castle (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

³ Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London: Verso, 1997).

⁴ *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Padmini Mongia (London: Arnold, 1996). This collection does include an essay by Aijaz Ahmad, one of the more prominent Pakistanis in the field of postcolonial studies. However, unlike the material on the history and politics of his country, so conspicuous in his earlier work, its literature remains largely absent from his main theoretical writings.

⁵ *Reading the "New" Literatures in a postcolonial era*, ed. by Susheila Nasta (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000).

⁶ *Into the Nineties: Post-Colonial Women's Writing*, ed. by Anna Rutherford, Lars Jensen and Shirley Chew (Armidale: Dangaroo, 1994).

been appropriated by the discourse's 'global' span, whilst others continue to be marginalised by such an appropriation.⁷

Ali, and the work of Pakistani women writers spanning the sixty years since their country's inception and independence, illuminates what is at stake in the elision of the Indian sub-continent's 'dark corners'. Their contributions are apparently not 'South Asian' enough and Pakistan becomes the geographical silence in the academic study of 'South Asian' writing. As women involved in the active shaping and reinvention of the Pakistani nation, their presence seems equally destabilising to conventional accounts of their country's rise to nationhood. Their practice exists between the fissured spaces of literary, academic and historical discourse and the main concerns of this thesis are located here.

It must be emphasised at this point that the work of a collection of Pakistani male writers has recently enjoyed significant success, both in a commercial and academic sense. Mohsin Hamid with *Moth Smoke* (2000) and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), and Daniyal Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2009) offer interesting cases. Both are diasporic authors and this speaks to the postcoloniality of their work and the way it frames migrant experiences and national identity against a context that is undoubtedly Pakistani. Mohammad Hanif is also currently enjoying literary recognition with the satirical *A Case of Exploding Mangos* (2008), a text which figures Pakistani history more palpably in its parody of General Zia's regime. The popular reception of these novels and, by extension, their authors, nonetheless raises more questions than answers. The extent to which their work, particularly in its diasporic context, spatially and historically maps Pakistan is a prescient concern. It is

⁷ *The Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies*, ed. by Fawzia Afzal Khan and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (London: Duke University Press, 2000). Of particular interest here is Fawzia Afzal Khan's fascinating 'Street Theatre in Pakistani Punjab: The Case of Ajoka, Lok Rehs, and the (So-Called) Women's Question', pp.171-179.

usually the case that the fashionable status of these texts bears some sort of correlation with how their representations may be amenable to a specific theoretical framework. More is left out, therefore, than is included, especially where the work of Pakistani women writers is concerned. And this is reflected in current research on texts by 'South Asian' women. With the notable exceptions of Phillipa Kafka and Niluka Silva, 'South Asia' almost exclusively produces a literary cartography of India and its women writers.⁸

The narratives of the writers considered here have received scant attention even in Pakistan, their own 'indigenous' country of production. Mastoor and Ali apart, there are authors, both within the *Kahani* anthology and that have emerged more recently, whose work forms part of a continuously rich narrative tradition. In 1997, Muneeza Shamsie (mother of Kamila Shamsie), a pioneering feminist academic in Pakistan, edited *And the World Changed: Contemporary Stories by Pakistani Women*. Shamsie's compilation of short stories contains the work of many of the authors featured in *Kahani* and this project. These include Jamila Hashmi and Fahmida Riaz. Mumtaz Shirin and Khalida Hussain with *The Awakening* and *Hoops of Fire* respectively, emphasise the complex debate between feminist consciousness and nationalist ideology that was, and continues to be prescient in the work of Pakistani women writers. A particularly interesting case, however, is Umme Umara, whose

⁸ Phillipa Kafka makes reference to Bapsi Sidhwa in *On the Outside looking In(dian): Indian Women Writers at Home and Abroad* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003). I refer to Silva's excellent study in Chapter 3. Recent works on writing by 'South Asian' women which are methodical enough but underscore an Indian hegemony include: Jaspal Kaur Singh, *Representation and Resistance : South Asian and African women's Texts at Home and in the Diaspora* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2008) and Clara Nubile, *The Danger of Gender, Class, Caste and Gender in Indian Women's Writing* (New Delhi, Sarup and Sons, 2003). Other earlier but influential examples are Sandra Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture: Contemporary Women Writers of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) and *Between Spaces of Silence: Women Creative Writers*, ed. by Kamini Dinesh (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1994).

narrative *The Sin of Innocence*,⁹ exemplifies the concerns that have shaped her work, namely those related to the ‘creation’ of Bangladesh. It tends to be forgotten that after the initial Partition of the Pakistan, a second separation occurred in 1971, out of which East Pakistan became Bangladesh. Umara’s work occupies these spaces that are the site of multiple inscriptions and refashioning by conflicting nationalist forces. Questions of ‘home’ and national belonging are complicated by Umara’s feminist perspective and the difficult questions it poses to the ‘new’ Bangladesh. Moving onto more contemporary literature, as well as the authors that will be featured in this project, there is the immensely intriguing work of Themina Durrani. A feminist activist and writer, in 1994 she produced *My Feudal Lord*, a semi autobiographical text that caused scandal in Pakistan for the way it depicted debauchery and corruption in (male) elite circles of society. The eponymous ‘Feudal Lord’ husband is an allegorical reference to Duranni’s abusive, former husband.¹⁰ Her latest novel, *Blasphemy*, directs a critical gaze at the country’s theocracy and its considerable role in suppressing any kind of feminist voice. She had to seek publication in India amidst the controversy the book caused. These gendered interventions and voices, of course, do not feature on the literary map of ‘South Asia’. Canonical writers such as Salman Rushdie or Hanif Kureishi become representative of the diverse spaces of this region. The problems here are multi-layered. Not only are Pakistan and its literary traditions lost in the margins of such iconic signifiers, the presence of the aforementioned women authors becomes further effaced in their country’s own attempt to retrieve and fashion a history.

⁹ Details for all of these short stories can be found in *Kahani*.

¹⁰ Sawnet, Themina Duranni, <<http://www.sawnet.org/books/authors.php?Durrani+Tehmina>>. (Accessed 10 October 2008)

The History Boys (And Girls)

It is imperative in a project such as this, to sketch the historical context against which many of the women writers were working. These events bore an undoubted influence on their work, both past and present. In particular, women's roles in Independence movements suggest that the women of India were not simply confined to the domesticated spaces of 'home'. Many of them instead consistently exposed the fluidity of the binaries of 'tradition' and 'modernity', 'home' and 'world'. And this demands a re-evaluation of the nationalist historiography of the period.

The legacy of the complicated and fractured relationship between gender and nationalism, so brutally flagged up during the creation of Pakistan, can ironically be traced back to a period when Indian expressions of feminism played an active part in defining the Independence movement. Far from politically neutered and silenced, groups of influential Indian feminists ensured the concerns of the women they represented, in terms of basic rights and freedoms, shaped the policy and direction that the imminently postcolonial Indian state was to take. Rozina Visram thus describes the formation and remit of the Women's India Association (WIA), possibly India's most iconic feminist organisation:

Founded in Madras in 1917 by Dorothy Jinarajadasa, Margaret Cousins and Annie Besant, the WIA was a national organisation with branches throughout India. It had its own journal, *Stri-Dhrama*, and its membership was open to all religious groups in India. It was the WIA which was to provide a voice for the women's campaign for the vote after the First World War.¹¹

¹¹ Rozina Visram, *Women in India and Pakistan: The Struggle for Independence from British Rule* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.16.

Other important figures included Sarojini Naidu and Jahanra Shah Nawaz, both of whom, significantly, represented opposing political parties in the Indian Congress and Muslim League respectively. Although Shah Nawaz took up her position with the League in 1930, she was an active participant in ‘the all-India women’s organizations’ prior to political division.¹² After Independence and Partition, the two women would eventually take up prominent roles in the administrations of India and Pakistan. As well as a ‘national’ mandate, it is prescient that in Margaret Cousins and Annie Besant, the WIA retained strong links with the white, middle-class woman’s suffrage movement. Regardless of the presence of these two founding members, however, one could argue that with the country still ostensibly under colonial rule, such an association was perhaps unavoidable. Cousins, with Naidu, established the All India Woman’s Conference in 1927, another powerful and influential group.¹³ But a narrative of seamless dialogue and contemporaneity between two discrete feminisms would be specious at best. And this is just one of the many complexities such a politically couched, gendered intervention illuminates.

According to Mrinalini Sinha then, one of the defining moments for the increasingly influential and burgeoning feminism of the Indian sub-continent was the controversy surrounding American anthropologist Katherine Mayo’s book *Mother India* (1927) and specifically the opportunities created in its political aftermath. Briefly, Mayo’s polemic- written as a repost to India’s growing pretensions of postcolonial Independence- depicts the ‘mother’ of the Indian nation as the abject ‘other’ of the nourishing, pure and chaste female totem of the ‘West’. The ‘abnormal’ and ‘unnatural’ that Mayo foregrounds, locates the Indian family’s otherness in the

¹² Mrinalini Sinha, *Spectres of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (London: Duke University Press, 2006), p.206.

¹³ Sinha, p.210.

intemperate sexual appetite of its men and the sexual depravity of its women, all of which crystallizes around the image of a mother whose offspring are deformed and ‘lacking’, savage in ways that are a danger to themselves and their ‘others’.¹⁴ This kind of Orientalist diatribe had been providing the apparatus for colonial ideology well before it surfaced in the text of a transatlantic feminist casting her all conquering eye Eastwards. The ‘oversexed’, ‘intemperate’ native provides an effective counterpoint against which an ideally white, ideally male self can be constructed, a self consistently validated and legitimised by the difference safely contained in the confines of its ‘other’. What is interesting here is the way Sinha reads the Mayo controversy, and its implications for how gender intervened in nationalist politics and attempted to carve out a niche for itself in India’s unfolding postcolonial history:

The unprecedented involvement of women and of women’s organisations in the debates [...] underwrote a crucial political development: the construction of women as *both* the subjects *and* the objects of social reforms in India. In other words, the collective mobilization of women qua women authorized new gendered subjectivities for women in the public realm that itself empowered different groups of women unevenly.¹⁵

Through lobbying for legislation in the form of the Sarda Act, which concerned raising the age of marital consent for young girls, these influential women and organisations such as the WIA succeeded in ‘crystallizing an alternative political imagination’ that was ‘enabled precisely by the construction of women’s collective agency’.¹⁶ And it is in this way that the women and organisations making these political interventions are ‘both subjects and objects’, where agency can only be fashioned and imagined within the hegemonic and not outside. Feminist concerns are

¹⁴ Katherine Mayo, *Mother India* (New York: Jonathan Cape, 1927).

¹⁵ Sinha, pp.153-154.

¹⁶ Sinha, p.153

ventriloquized through nationalist state politics, where a destabilising gendered intervention can occur from within. Yet there is a sense of unease in Sinha's confident assertion that 'something new had emerged'.¹⁷ And these reservations not only stem from the benefit of hindsight- in terms of the way the history of the sub-continent enunciated itself essentially through 'woman as object' rather than 'subject'- but focus very much on a significant moment in India's gendered past:

This [raising the age of marital consent for young girls through legislation] gave the Sarda Act a nationalist resonance that went beyond even the famed Act of 1829 abolishing Sati- widely acknowledged as the first "modern" piece of social legislation for women in India- that had affected only a certain section of Hindus.¹⁸

Seen in the context of the infamous, traditional Brahmin practice of widow self-immolation, Mayo's book and the Sarda Act begin to take on a significantly different hue in terms of their impact on feminist politics in India. The legislation's historic legacy is evident in Spivakian theories on epistemic violence. But 'the "modern" piece of social legislation' is also now widely recognised as curtailing the agency of the Indian woman just as much as the burning funeral pyre of her deceased husband.¹⁹ Patriarchy expressed through different discursive frameworks is still patriarchy. In this way, Mayo's text can arguably be viewed as ideological apparatus for a comparable type of benign colonial politics, where imperial government is exchanged for the 'nationalist recuperation of the state's agency'.²⁰ The question is whether nationalist movements rooted in postcolonial independence can be reconciled with the

¹⁷ Sinha, p.161.

¹⁸ Sinha, p.161.

¹⁹ See, Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Andrea Major, *Pious Flames, European Encounters with Sati, 1500-1830* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

²⁰ Sinha, p.161

fashioning of feminist agency. In other words, can a conflation be made between the nationalist 'state's agency' and a gendered one which seeks to locate and express itself in and through the nation? The Mayo controversy emphasised a discursive contemporaneity between nationalist and colonial patriarchies, each reactive in their imagining of a 'modern' India that marginalises the country's women as much as that regressive 'other' nation on the opposing side of the binary. But it was perhaps just the trigger for the complex trajectory of how Indian feminism was to unravel until and after the fateful events of 1947.

There is an eerie continuity then between how the Indian feminist movement developed and the shocking violence that postcolonial independence signified for the women of what became two nations. The ideological tropes that the tenuous rapprochement between gendered and nationalist interests was predicated on appear to have ironically formed in a period of burgeoning feminist activity. And they were engaged during the aftermath of the country's Partition, both to legitimise violent acts against women, and to justify an intervention that ultimately circumscribed the subjectivity of the Indian woman whilst seeming to act in her interests. To quote Sinha:

Our story thus ends with the containment of women's political agency- but for reasons that are only poorly understood. Just as the crisis in the colonial sociology of India had created the conditions for a new construction of women as ideal citizens, so also the particular context of the political wrangling over a reform constitution for colonial India forced open its contradictory foundations.²¹

The impasse confronting Indian feminists, in terms of how they established a political presence between the 'equality' and 'difference' that Sinha identifies, plays a more

²¹ Sinha, p.198.

significant role in the eventual ‘containment of agency’ than she gives it credit for.²² As she explains in painstaking detail, after the ‘success’ of the Sarda Act, it was made clear that the continued political survival of a feminist interest in the nationalist fold was contingent on certain choices that had to be made, choices that were framed within a familiar binary. Either these women were struggling for ‘equality’, in which case they were to be brought in to the nationalist administration with no more rights than their male counterparts, or they were to align themselves with other minorities and therefore be given special privileges, ones no doubt germane to a position of absolute ‘difference’.²³ What the response of the main organisations was is not as relevant as the ideological cul de sac that had been created for them. Choosing to be equal would ultimately alienate those Muslim and Sikh women in their midst, and yet adopting a stand of difference would risk an alignment with those very communal ideologies involved in the marginalisation and brutalisation of many of their members.²⁴

What is also interesting, however, is the way this symbiosis between nationalist state and local community operates in a similar way to efface the presence and agency of the Indian woman, post-Partition. During the outbreak of violence, representatives of both emerging states freely employed gendered, patriarchal rhetoric that would find sympathy in the communal spaces where the brutality was being perpetrated.²⁵ Yet the respective nationalist positions would also be careful to distance themselves from what was unfolding, so that in its aftermath, they could temporarily replace failed

²² Sinha, p.198

²³ For an explanation of how voting was administered, see Sinha, p.215.

²⁴ Sinha describes the history behind these processes very well between pp.198-215.

²⁵ Chapter 3 will have a more detailed discussion of this. Sinha alludes to the potentially explosive, communal situation on p.232, especially in her section on ‘Reconstituting Dominant Group Identities’.

communal homes and be the benevolent 'Father' which thousands of dispossessed and dislocated women 'needed'. It was a skilfully played out ideological manoeuvre but one that evidently can be traced back to a time when powerful gendered interventions were being made in the nationalist arena. The nationalist state absorbed the gendered voice, not vice versa. The 'new construction of women' that Sinha nostalgically evokes did not exist outside a nationalist framework. State ideology played the game and therefore set the rules. Feminist agency could not be imagined outside either the state's own parameters, or its ostensibly opposed, yet at the same time complementary, counterpart. The result was a feminist movement which became divorced from its own political imperatives:

Women's collective agency became implicated in an ambiguous political consolidation that provided crucial ideological cover for a reconstituted Hindu, upper-caste, and male polity.²⁶

The tragic culmination of such alliances was to emerge several years later, but the groundwork was laid. It was a *fait accompli* which shaped the way feminist organisations were to form and operate in the newly established nation states. India continued to have a vibrant feminist landscape in the immediate aftermath of Partition. All the main groups, in the form of the AIWC and WIA, remained, with the exception of some significant Muslim absentees. These had migrated to Pakistan where the story is rather bleaker. Despite promises by the Muslim League of political influence and a guarantee of basic rights and freedoms, figures like Jahanra Shah Nawaz became marginalised until at least the late 1950s.²⁷ Feminist agitation and lobbying of the like there had been in India was virtually non-existent.²⁸

²⁶ Sinha, p.199.

This overview of the pre-Partition feminism serves as a reminder of the number of women engaged in politics and reform. At the same time however, the limits of these feminism(s) as they were played out in India's political arena cannot be ignored. The fashioning, imagining or narrating of agency remained fraught with complexities, complexities in which the subject positions of 'other' women continued to be effaced. It is in this fissured area where women authors make their interventions, be they from the period itself or more retrospective accounts. Especially pertinent is how the political dilemma between 'equality' and 'difference', as concrete positions across which Indian womanhood was to be enunciated, is, more or less, the binary that writers such as Khadija Mastoor and Bapsi Sidhwa grapple with when mediating female agency in the historical moments of Independence and Partition.

Attempting to provide a detailed account and excavation of Pakistani 'history' is neither the purpose nor concern of this thesis and is certainly beyond its scope. The status of Pakistan as postcolonial is curious, fraught with conflict and contradiction stemming from the fractious political and historical contexts of its inception and creation. India is postcolonial in the 'conventional' sense of the term, with a 'colonial past uniquely its own'.²⁹ Pakistan, on the other hand, marks 'Independence' on 14 August, 1947, as the date it was effectively written into existence, a country annexed from a state that had become 'truly' postcolonial. Hence 'history' really does become the product of inscription, the past imagined. And the space of colonial history, against which postcolonial opposition constructs itself, is replaced with discourse and

²⁷ David Gilmartin, 'Partition, Pakistan and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 57.4 (1998), 236-260.

²⁸ Sinha, p.246

²⁹ Robert L. Ross, 'The Search for Community in Bapsi Sidhwa's Novels', in *The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa*, ed. by R.K. Dhawan and Novy Kapadia (New Delhi: Prestige, 2002), pp.71-79, (p.71).

discursive practice. To fully understand the implications that the material conditions shaping Pakistani nationalism had on feminist interventions which were both perhaps interpellated by state ideology and sought to change it, it is necessary to return to the site of this 'annexation'. The literary and social processes already underway in postcolonial India at the time of its own independence are formative here. Some critics may still insist on viewing the forces leading to the culmination of this seminal postcolonial moment as 'schematic and teleological' but they concede, nevertheless, that the discourses underpinning the nationalist impulse were fissured and conflicting rather than part of the sweep of a monolithic 'history'.³⁰ For Priyamvada Gopal, 'the' postcolonial 'struggle' in the Indian context 'was framed not as a dyadic one of coloniser against colonised, but as a war against a range of social and political forces'.³¹ Unfortunately however, in her excellent study of 'literary radicalism in India', 'history' does become somewhat 'dyadic', as the space of discourse and discursive practice only exclusively seems to be reconfigured by those writers and academics that are part of 'the radicalised climate'.³² Of course 'history' is not linear in this way, nor can the tenuous argument over who is best placed to narrate it be reduced to the spaces that divide the 'masses' and the bourgeois intelligentsia. The latter may choose to conduct 'a critique of ourselves, our class structures, our familial ideologies and the management of our bodies and sexualities' that shape the lives of the former, but it is important to then consider whether this narration of Indian 'history' brings the silences repressed beneath it any closer to enunciation.³³ More

³⁰ Priyamvada Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p.14.

³¹ Gopal, p.15.

³² Gopal, p.15.

³³ Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New York: Verso, 1992), p.130

significantly, these re-imaginings ostensibly seem to be ventriloquised rather than vocalised, in voices that perhaps do not represent the interests of the disenfranchised classes. So that for Gopal, the 'subaltern can speak' but simultaneously, in one of those curiously oxymoronic u-turns, it 'cannot'.³⁴ The limits of discourse, in this sense, are authorised, and the canvas of 'history' can only be written upon by those 'literary radicals' who are sufficiently imbued with the nationalistic sensibility to do so.

In post-Independence India, this honour was claimed by a group of academics and writers known as the PWA or Progressive Writers Association. They emerged mainly from the various 'social and political forces ranging from gender, caste religion and labour', and were employing the new nation as a site or 'ground on which to stake their claim'.³⁵ The Association initially mobilised and started to become politically active through their writings in 1936, four years before the infamous anthology *Angarey*, which featured Ismat Chughtai's 'The Quilt', was banned by a combination of moral panic and a successful appeal to the colonial court.³⁶ Khalid Alvi,³⁷ editing the 1995 edition of the controversial collection of texts, suggests that the compilation was instrumental in the formation of the PWA, a 'crystallisation of the radicalising trends begun years before'.³⁸ What is interesting when thinking through this immensely significant context to the work of postcolonial Pakistani women writers is emphasised by a comment Alvi makes about how 'being born into that particular

³⁴ Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?: Speculations on Widow Sacrifice', *Wedge*, 7 (1985), 120-130.

³⁵ Gopal, p.3 and p.4.

³⁶ Gopal, p.16.

³⁷ Khalid Alvi, 'Introduction', in *Angarey: An Anthology*, ed. by Khalid Alvi (New Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1995), p.102.

³⁸ Gopal, p.16.

Society, they [the authors in *Angare*] felt themselves better qualified to speak for that alone'.³⁹ If this is the case then what is emphasised, surely, is a specifically classed intervention in the ideological and political framework of the nation, specific to certain kinds of representation. And this raises important questions about how gender may have figured across this representational space- how the PWA's prominent women authors engaged with gender as a part of a wider nationalist imperative in their work and whether they had to struggle to be heard as much as perhaps the marginalised women they were speaking for.

The agenda of the organisation is carefully summarised by one of its leading lights, Mulk Raj Anand:

Radical changes are taking place in Indian Society [...] We believe that the new literature of India must deal with the basic problems of our existence today- the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political subjection. All that drags us down to passivity, inaction and unreason we reject as reactionary. All that arouses in us the critical spirit, which examines institutions and customs in the light of reason, which helps us to act, to organize ourselves, to transform, we accept as progressive.⁴⁰

In this 'newly radicalised literary climate', the position of the PWA can be contextualised in interesting ways which help illuminate how influential it was in mobilising postcolonial discourse on the Indian Subcontinent.⁴¹ Anand emerges as a curious figure here. Perhaps one of the first in what was to become a tradition of metropolitan intellectuals and writers, he and contemporary Sajjad Zaheer, through several 'encounters', had developed what Gopal refers to as 'a personal acquaintance' with the Bloomsbury Group and the 'International Writers for the Defence of

³⁹ Alvi, p.102.

⁴⁰ Mulk Raj Anand, 'On the Progressive Writers Movement', in *Marxist Cultural Movement in India*, ed. by S. Pradhan, vol. 1 (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1979), 14-31 (p.15).

⁴¹ Gopal, p.16.

Culture', an organisation that included writers from the wider milieu of European modernism.⁴² It is attractive to assume as Gopal does, that 'the genesis' of this most influential group 'can be traced back to these two curiously disparate influences'.⁴³ Anand's literary call to arms seems to 'reproduce the excitement of Bloomsbury' but with a 'definitively anti-imperialist' political agenda as a part of its conspicuously socialist inspired nationalist ideology.⁴⁴ And yet closer inspection reveals significant flaws in this historical perspective concerning the beginnings of literary radicalism in India. Gopal depicts modernism as it emerged in Europe or specifically Britain in monolithic terms. Modernism as Anand encountered it in 1930s Britain, it appears, exclusively 'endorsed imperialism'.⁴⁵ It can be rather convincingly argued that some texts from this period and literary movement are Orientalist and depict the colonial 'other' in ways that reveal an imperialist political unconscious. But of course for every Orientalist text which exoticises colonial space or represents its subjects as 'degenerate', there are nuanced and complicated delineations of the tenuous relationship between coloniser and colonised such as *A Passage to India*. E.M Forster's novel is not obviously part of a liberationist project that recognises India's right to independence and humanises its 'others'. But neither is it apolitical; the way that difference is complicated to the point where its constructed complexity cannot be eschewed undercuts any colonial ideology the text may seek to reinforce. Forster's piece of modernist fiction can, therefore, be read as a decidedly 'anti-imperial' intervention in the pantheon of European modernism, which renders Gopal's historical perspective on the PWA's 'genesis' somewhat problematic. The early work

⁴² Gopal, p.23.

⁴³ Gopal, p.23.

⁴⁴ Gopal, p.23.

⁴⁵ Gopal, p.23

of the writers that formed the PWA cannot simply be viewed as existing in an antagonistic relationship to its pseudo-colonial, modernist and 'progressive other'. In his later work, Anand claims that his task as a writer was to affect a kind of excavation, where 'history' could be recovered 'from the maligning of Imperialist archaeology on the one side and from its misuse by reactionary elements in our society, whether they be the narrow nationalist revivalists, the priestcraft, or orthodoxy'.⁴⁶ He seems to have developed the kind of deep rooted suspicion of both colonial and nationalist structures which he sees as essential to reshaping and expressing a broad-based, socialist-inspired, nationalist ideology.

Anand of course, was not the only author and political activist in the organisation. Other writers such as Ahmed Ali and Mahmudzafar offered different literary responses to nationalism in terms of caste and religion.⁴⁷ If these were the beginnings of a recognisable literary movement that both included women and was formative to the work of later Pakistani women writers, it is important to consider how they represented themselves and which voices were left unheard. The feminist interventions in this milieu of opposition and activism were represented in the writings of two of the sub-continent's most prominent women practitioners, Dr. Rashid Jahan and Ismat Chughtai, both notable contemporaries of Hijab Imtiaz Ali and other Pakistani women writers of their generation.⁴⁸ They epitomised the rise to prominence of what Geraldine Forbes explains was a discrete class of bourgeois Muslim women.⁴⁹ Jahan and Chughtai were born in 1905 and 1915 respectively.

⁴⁶ Anand, p.18.

⁴⁷ Gopal, p.17.

⁴⁸ Gopal, p.17.

⁴⁹ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Following markedly different careers, their paths were to meet, nonetheless, first with the publication of *Angarey* and then as members of the PWA. Chughtai, by this time, was already an avid reader of Jahan's work, which at that stage mainly consisted of plays and short stories.⁵⁰ The latter studied medicine at Lady Hardinge Medical College in Delhi whilst Chughtai had to lobby her parents hard before they agreed to send her to Aligarh Muslim University. According to Gopal, becoming part of the medical establishment enabled Jahan to question 'how we might recuperate scientific and medical knowledge from the power relations in which they are imbricated while understanding that knowledge is never politically unmarked'.⁵¹ Indeed, as a female doctor, Jahan was permitted access to what precious few were: the female body. Concerns relating to how the body can be located in the new nation and the role gender has to play in this pervade her work.⁵²

Both women were involved in the political and organisational activities of the PWA and were incarcerated for separate agitations against the pre-independence and postcolonial governments. As writers, they were in broad agreement with Anand's belief in the politically and ideologically 'transformative' potential of their literary practice, even though their focus on gender and nationalism may have made those politics more complex. Being Muslim and not born in what became religiously demarcated as Pakistan, both women returned to India after being initially dislocated following Partition.⁵³ Educated and politically active, they essentially occupied the

⁵⁰ Gopal, p.41.

⁵¹ Gopal, p.40.

⁵² Jahan's work remains elusive and is mainly written in Urdu. For an excellent critical insight see Priyamvada Gopal, 'Sex, Space and Modernity in the Work of Rashid Jahan, "Angareywali"', in *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonialism*, ed. by Neil Lazarus and Crystal Bartolovich (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.150-66.

⁵³ A. Ali, 'The Progressive Writers Movement and its Historical Perspectives', *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 13.4 (1977-78), 91-98. One of the few detailed contributions to the subject and field besides

margins of ‘organisations’ that began to ‘lose their hegemony’⁵⁴ as suddenly different classed and religious epistemologies emerged to systematically ‘undermine their claim to speak for all Indian women’.⁵⁵ Rashid Jahan became a prominent voice amongst these marginalised women, who mobilised their resources to form the All India-Muslim Women’s Conference.⁵⁶ Yet the title here is somewhat misleading in suggesting that gendered, religious nationalism formed the organisation’s main concerns. Initially, Jahan and her contemporaries were simply focused on representation, finding themselves in a peculiarly similar position to Anand’s classed subaltern, on the borders of Imperialism, Gandhian nationalism and a feminist response to this. Jahan was perhaps aware, due to her medical background, as Gopal suggests, that her class position was an obstacle to establishing a political empathy with those Muslim women that did not enjoy the same privileges. Interestingly, despite the presence of what seemed to be a centralised organisation, the political activism of prominent Muslim women like Jahan manifested itself in various forms. The doctor herself occupied different positions on the Indian left, sometimes ‘Marxist, communist or socialist’.⁵⁷ The conundrum of attempting to fashion agency as a middle-class, Muslim woman, intellectual and writer found myriad political expressions until Jahan arrived at the PWA.

Chughtai, infamous for her allegedly homoerotic short story ‘The Quilt’ and frank representations of sexuality, was actually Jahan’s protégé. It appears obvious that the author was aware of the controversial impact her contribution to the *Angarey*

Gopal’s, this is particularly good for tracing the historical impact of the Movement and its most influential writers.

⁵⁴ Forbes, p.189.

⁵⁵ Gopal, p.21

⁵⁶ Gopal, p.21.

⁵⁷ Gopal, p.21.

anthology would have. Yet her story, in light of its notoriety and continued influence on South Asian textual and visual culture, demands closer inspection.⁵⁸ It is narrated from the perspective of a little girl, who is sent away by her mother to stay with her aunty during a particularly hot summer. Begum Jan, as she is known, is a bored housewife, neglected by a rich husband who prefers to spend most of his time with 'young, fair and slim-waisted boys'.⁵⁹ The lady of the house is awakened from her apathetic stupor, however, when Rabbo, a female servant enters her life:

Rabbo came to her rescue just as she was starting to go under. Suddenly her emaciated body began to fill out. Her cheeks became rosy; beauty, as it were, glowed through every pore! It was a special oil massage that brought about the change in Begum Jan. Begging your pardon, you will not find the recipe for this oil in the most exclusive or expensive magazine! (p.3)

These massages are administered from underneath a large, decorative quilt, where the narrator witnesses them only through Begum Jan's wailing and sighs of relief initially. However, as these become more pronounced, her niece's frustration turns to curiosity. Imagining what could be occurring beneath the quilt both repels and fascinates her. The denouement brings about the expected uncovering, but there is also a veiling at the same time as it is never revealed to the audience in any certain terms, as to what exactly it was that the narrator saw:

⁵⁸ Chughtai's short story was made into a feature length film by Deepa Mehta, *Fire*, Trial By Fire Films Inc., 1996, Canada, DVD. The film was part of a trilogy which also included an adaptation of the Bapsi Sidhwa novel *Ice-Candy Man* as its opening title *Earth*. It must be emphasised that the expression 'loosely based' applies very much here. The film tends to focus on overplaying what, in its source material, are very subtle allusions to the *possibilities* of homoeroticism. In this way, its visceral portrayal risks becoming clichéd, and sits rather uncomfortably in terms of voyeurism, and the exoticisation of India through tropes of apparently subversive female sexuality.

⁵⁹ Ismat Chughtai, 'The Quilt', in *The Quilt, and Other Stories: Ismat Chughtai*, trans. by Tahira Naqvi and Syeda S. Hameed (New Delhi: Kalhi for Women, 1990), pp.1-9 (p.1).

"Ammi!" I spoke with courage, but no one heard me. The quilt, meanwhile, had entered my brain and started growing. Quietly creeping to the other side of the bed I swung my legs over and sat up. In the dark I groped for the switch. The elephant somersaulted beneath the quilt and dug in. During the somersault, its corner was lifted one foot above the bed. Allah! I dove headlong into my sheets!! What I saw when the quilt was lifted, I will never tell anyone, not even if they give me a lakh of rupees. (p.9)

Sexuality runs the risk of becoming a monolithic framework of interpretation in Chughtai's narrative. As far as the quilt is concerned, it is the site of polysemy, a symbol that frames the unspeakable in so many different ways. These must be viewed in context. It would be specious to deny the corporeal sensuality in the story. However, this should not be used to marginalise its other rich complexities. In this sense, Begum Jan may have transformed herself as newly sexed subject from within the very parameters of domestic patriarchy. But central to such a change is Rabbo, an underclass woman. The repository for the unspeakable which the quilt becomes, and what the narrator sees, may well be the invisible narrative of this woman. In terms of subversive sexualities, it must also be remembered that before Begum Jan's potential awakening by Rabbo, there is compelling innuendo around her husband as well, an agent of patriarchy. This controversial story should, therefore, be viewed in the context Chughtai wrote it in, and the political challenges she faced as a member of a mainly male centred organisation.

Though Chughtai's work is more widely recognised when compared with Jahan's, she was politically active only in the areas of academia, where according to Gopal, she felt she could make a visible difference. She remained 'sympathetic to communism but would not have truck with official literary ideologies of any sort', which emphasises how the organisation itself, and the political position of its women members, was far from monolithic.⁶⁰ Jahan's altruistic preoccupation with the cause

of working-class women may seem dubious; she found herself in a position to narrate their experiences and represent their interests without necessarily having any 'real' knowledge about their suffering and predicament.⁶¹ According to Gopal, this changed when she herself was jailed for participating in a Trade Union demonstration, where she 'came to understand how gender was invariably inflected by class'.⁶² The paradox in this claim is one that not only threw Jahan's own position as a woman writer in a male-centred organisation into sharp focus but also permeated her work. 'Class' is not something that happens elsewhere, in the fields or the villages or homes of labourers, class intersects with gender the moment Jahan attempts to represent working-class women; class signifies her own position as a middle-class Muslim woman and political activist around whom those peasant and village women may exist only as silences.

These authors 'claimed' for 'themselves and *other women* the authority to speak, not only about women's bodies and sex, but about modernity, science, progress, ethics and epistemology.'⁶³ The 'contestatory nature of the struggle for nationhood' was, therefore, played out in the conflicting texts produced by the PWA's women writers on the one hand, and its more illustrious male members on the other (emphasis mine).⁶⁴ Jahan's work appears only sporadically and is very rare due to translation from Urdu to English. She was a short story writer in the main and her most prominent work is *Dilli Kai Sair* or 'A trip to Delhi' which is printed in some editions of *Angare*. The anthology itself, or rather a reliable translation of it, is also difficult to

⁶⁰ Gopal, p.69.

⁶¹ Gopal. P.28

⁶² Gopal, p.29.

⁶³ Gopal, p.33.

⁶⁴ Gopal, p.19.

access. Nevertheless, the literary spaces from which independence culminated and ‘history’ was forged became a battleground for gender, a battle over historical representation. Yet closer interrogation of Anand’s comments in particular reveals the case as not being quite so clear cut. What constitutes ‘progressive’ seems to be very specifically delineated. And most interesting is the term ‘reason’, which apparently ‘customs and institutions’ will be ‘examined in the light of’. ⁶⁵ The empowering, nationalistic drive of this rhetoric is clear and undeniable, but also just as conspicuous is the kind of dangerous, pseudo-enlightenment framing of ‘reason’, as if any epistemology that fell outside its vaunted configurations would be marginalised or at worst discarded. An ostensibly oppositional discourse in this sense, becomes as selective as what it is opposing.

The work of Jahan and Chughtai has to be viewed in this complex space, for while, as Gopal argues, they may have been alienated by the organisation’s somewhat masculinist framing of its agenda, they must have also subscribed to its wider politics. That is not to suggest that they subscribed to the politics of patriarchy in any way, but that their work must at the same time be understood as existing between the gaps and within the tensions that defined these conflicts. History and nationalism, therefore, become dissonant and precarious rather than linear and stable, with even those hegemonies that claim to shape them subject to eschewing their own feminist interventions. Jahan and Chughtai are as silenced here as ‘the other women’ whose narratives they are involved in imagining, who Gopal claims they have ‘the authority to speak’ for. So that where ‘the organisational story of the PWA is, to some extent, that of a male dominated institution’ the ‘other’ woman is at once produced as the

⁶⁵ Anand, p.15

différance of that history.⁶⁶ She is the ‘trace’, an absent presence in the enunciation of both Anand’s and Chughtai and Jahan’s discourse, where the latter two writers themselves struggle to find ‘historical’ representation. In one of Chughtai’s most ‘celebrated’ stories, ‘The Crooked Line’ ‘the melting down of all that is solid’, where ‘history’ cannot escape its gendered contingency, is hence a simultaneously regenerative and alienating experience’:⁶⁷

The more she understood the enigma the more difficult and convoluted it seemed to become. It felt as though the new Shaman was playing hide and seek with her. As soon as she came close to touching her, she would dissolve in the wind. Sometimes she would feel like she had caught her. But before she could identify her features, she would let go of her hand and duck away.⁶⁸

This *Bildungsroman* of the life and times of Shaman, the heroine whose development is charted, illuminates the significant concerns flagged up by Chughtai’s feminist interventions in the ‘history’ of India and the PWA. According to one critic, ‘through Shaman, we perceive that Chughtai has learned that forthright, outspoken women are always put down and have to develop ways to cope, but often end up unhappy. Issues of race come up fairly often in the novel, often in the context of the nationalist struggle in India’.⁶⁹ These ‘issues’ also involve the ‘enigma’ of how to find agency, not only for the author herself as a woman writer, but for those ‘other women’, who seem to ‘dissolve’ just as their story is being constructed within the annals of a ‘history’ whose grasp they have to escape at the very moment their ‘features’ have

⁶⁶ Gopal, p.28.

⁶⁷ Gopal, p.78

⁶⁸ Ismat Chughtai, *Terhi Lakir (The Crooked Line)*, trans. by T. Naqvi (Oxford: Heinemann, 1995), p.189.

⁶⁹ Dolores Chew, *Reading Race and Gender in ‘Mummy’ and The Crooked Line: How Writers on Marginality Represent Anglo-Indian Women*, <<http://home.alphalink.com.au/~agilbert/readin~2.html>>. (Accessed 20 November, 2008)

been ‘identified’. These formative questions shape and inform the literary spaces of what becomes postcolonial, post-Independence Pakistan.

Pakistan- Future as Past?

Amina Yaqin refers to this historical space as a ‘complex entanglement of democracies and military dictatorships whose continued alternation has created a highly unstable political environment’.⁷⁰ Indeed, as the country continues to be of importance in the current global political climate- with the assassination of its only woman prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, the potential impeachment of its latest military dictator and on-going civil unrest underscored by widespread poverty- any linear narration of a Pakistani ‘history’ would seem rather disingenuous. What critics such as Shahnaz Rouse suggest, however, is that rather than view the events since Partition in 1947 across the binaries of ‘dictatorships and democracy’, ‘modernist/traditionalist’, it is perhaps more illuminating to interrogate the slippage between these formative narratives that appear to have shaped the course of nationalism in Pakistan.⁷¹ The ‘shadowy space between patriarchy and feminism’⁷² is where gender precariously rests in this historical narrative, Pakistani women and their significant role in this area being produced as the sign on the borders of apparently ‘contradictory’ discourses.⁷³ Here, an interesting starting point is part of a speech given by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the *Qaid-a-Azam* (translates literally as ‘Giver of

⁷⁰ Amina Yaqin, ‘The Intertextuality of Women in Urdu Literature’ (unpublished PhD thesis, SOAS, 2001), p.10.

⁷¹ Shahnaz Rouse, ‘Gender, Nationalism(s) and Cultural Identity: Discursive Strategies and Exclusivities’, in *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women’s Sexuality in South Asia*, ed. by Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi De Alvis (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996), pp.42-70 (p.44).

⁷² Yaqin, p.8.

⁷³ Rouse, p.47.

Freedom') of Pakistan and Leader of The All India Muslim League, the most prominent political body agitating for the creation of a separate nation for the Muslims of India: ⁷⁴

No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you. We are victims of evil customs. It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the house as prisoners. There is no sanction anywhere for the deplorable condition in which our women live. You should take your women along with you in every sphere of life. ⁷⁵

This is ostensibly the 'modern' position on the role that Pakistani women have to play in a 'history' that has yet to be written; Jinnah delivered the speech to the Muslim League in 1944. The conflict between such 'progressive' politics on the one hand, and the sensibilities which were rooted in a supposedly rigid, Islamocentric 'tradition' on the 'other', defined the formation and development of Pakistan according to hegemonic historical accounts. Yet as Rouse has astutely highlighted, these narratives appear to be oblivious to how the two 'contradictory' ideological positions not only both employed religion as an essentialising apparatus, but were in fact united by a mutual emphasis on 'preserving control over women'. ⁷⁶ This is where Partha Chatterjee's mediation of gender through the dichotomy of the 'material and spiritual' becomes prescient. ⁷⁷ For Rouse, both Jinnah and his 'traditionalist' opponents 'sought not to reject modernism, but to selectively utilise it in ways that would fulfil

⁷⁴ Rouse, p.57.

⁷⁵ This speech Jinnah gave at Aligarh is quoted in *Iqbal, Jinnah and Pakistan: The Vision and the Reality*, ed. by C.M. Naim (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1970), pp.45-52.

⁷⁶ Rouse, p.45.

⁷⁷ Partha Chatterjee, 'The Nationalist Resolution to the Women's Question', in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, ed. by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Delhi: Kalhi for Women, 1999), pp.235-253 (p.237).

the middle-class desire for hegemony for both'.⁷⁸ In this sense, Islam as essentialist discourse becomes contemporaneous with gender and 'class'. For both the Deobandis⁷⁹ as 'traditionalists' opposed to Jinnah, and the 'progressives' he claimed to represent, a commitment to the teachings of the religious text simultaneously provided a roadmap for working-class women to aspire to middle-class values as Rouse suggests, and for middle-class women to construct and maintain difference from that 'other' group respectively.⁸⁰ The ideological work for nationalism was established through an illusory reality, the promise of Pakistani women's 'active agency in the social process'.⁸¹ The space outside Jinnah's 'four walls' is one where the limits are still established by patriarchy, but are just imagined differently. The role of Pakistani women is discursive, symbolic and defined within the binaries underpinning nationalism. They are to be the guardians of the spiritual or the traditional, the purveyors of social mobility and 'progress', but only in ways where their bodies and representational status are controlled by men. And it is these men, whether Deobandi or Muslim League, 'modernist' or 'traditional', who define their position in 'history'.

Whilst these arguments over agency are thoroughly convincing however, they are also somewhat reductive. In an evidently Foucauldian sense, Rouse insists that what feminists claim is 'the male project of nationalism, centred around male desire [...] could not have been adequately accomplished without the active participation of

⁷⁸ Rouse, p.45.

⁷⁹ Deobandism is an Islamic movement which emerged in response to colonial rule. Its religious nature made it a powerful ideological mobiliser of anti-colonial sentiment. Prominent figures include Syed Abul A'ala Maududi. According to Rouse, this influential group of clerics and theologians opposed the 'two-nation theory.' Many were imprisoned for voicing their views. Deobandism today is simultaneously ideological, political and spiritual. The name is derived from the province of Deoband, where it originated from.

⁸⁰ Rouse, p.44.

⁸¹ Rouse, p.45.

women'.⁸² The interpellation of Pakistani women as postcolonial subjects is all pervasive then. And even when the tenuous ideology underpinning nationalism is threatened by its very dependence on women, this potentially dissonant space provides no such opportunity for agency, instead producing and foreclosing its own opposition. So that for Rouse, the small concessions made concerning inheritance rights under General Ayub in the Fifties, following one of the first and most prominent military coups, were still delivered within the limits of patriarchal nationalist ideology and the political apparatus it employed to assert itself. Freedom administered in small doses, a subversion that was managed and controlled.⁸³ Almost three decades on from the point which Rouse discusses, it is interesting to note how, particularly in the light of recent events concerning her assassination, Benazir Bhutto's initial rise to power is framed within a similar critical methodology. Ayesha Jalal suggests that 'the first state in the Islamic world to have a woman prime minister [...] remains substantially unchanged, economically, legally and politically'.⁸⁴ Yet her view of this historical juncture in the nascent nation seems far more nuanced, where Benazir is but a totem, a symbol for the continued silencing of those 'other women' that Gopal refers to, the 'poor, unlettered women' for whom 'everyday forms of resistance have been muted in effect' since Benazir took the reins of a largely symbolic power.⁸⁵ Beyond a simple ideological interpellation then, the maintaining of the status quo is conscious and has tangible, material benefits and implications:

⁸² Rouse, p.45.

⁸³ Rouse, p.58.

⁸⁴ Ayesha Jalal, 'The Convenience of Subservience', in *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. by Deniz Kandiyoti (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp.77-114 (p.77).

⁸⁵ Jalal, p.78

As for those Pakistani women who are neither poor nor unlettered, submission can be socially rewarding. So long as they do not transgress social norms, women from the middle and upper strata in rural and urban areas alike are awarded respect as well as a modicum of privileges within the sphere of the family, and, depending on their generational and marital status, also in wider social networks.⁸⁶

It is not a case of working-class women benefiting here from a performance of the behaviour and values of their upper-class counterparts, but rather that the ‘subservience’ of the latter, manifest in their enjoyment of the privileges that accrue, has actively worked to confine the former to the margins of any symbolic feminist discourse there may have been in Pakistan at the time.⁸⁷ In this sense, Benazir being the country’s first woman prime minister did little more than perpetuate the continued ideological contemporaneity between religion, the state and nationalism. And indeed, as Jalal intelligently details, her tenure as Prime Minister before her contentious deposition in a democratic election by Nawaz Sharif in 1990, did little to either improve the lot of poorer women, or address the extent to which upper-class women such as herself were complicit in the continued existence of those conditions. Such a dialectical slant on ‘history’ is, once again, immensely useful. However, ‘subservience’, regardless of the ‘privileges’ that it yields, cannot be considered a ‘comfortable’ position for any alienated group. These benefits that Jalal discusses are still provided within the limits of a patriarchy that demands an upholding of its ‘norms’. The significant consideration concerns what will occur if these limits become strained by opposition or attempted subversion, where the imminent and very real threat of the resulting violence these women were confronted with is somewhat eschewed. Benazir’s time as the ‘mother of the nation’ may undoubtedly have served to throw into sharp focus the position of the ‘other’ Pakistani ‘woman’ at the borders

⁸⁶ Jalal, p.78.

⁸⁷ Jalal, p.78.

of politics and the discourse of feminism. But her premature and brutal erasure emphatically reinforces this violence and the way it is inscribed on the body, and bodypolitik, of women, across the conflicting and contradictory forces that shape Pakistani nationalism.

Given the gendered nature of nationalist ideology and its formative role in Pakistani 'history' then, Aijaz Ahmad's claim that he 'cannot remember a single novel in Urdu between 1935 and 1947, the crucial year leading up to decolonization, which is in any direct or exclusive way about "the experience of colonialism and imperialism"' frankly seems to display an astonishing degree of critical myopia.⁸⁸ Whilst narratives of 'rapes and murders, the barbarity of feudal landowners and the social and sexual frustrations of schoolgirls' may not directly reference them, the gendered binaries supporting Pakistani nationalist ideologies and the inequalities they produce may well be significant contexts and subtexts in the political and ideological work of these texts.⁸⁹ Elleke Boehmer's theorising on the relationship between gender and nationalism sheds some light here:

If the structure of nations or nation-states are soldered onto the struts of gender hierarchies, and if the organisation of power in the nation is profoundly informed by those structures, how then is the nation to be *imagined* outside of gender?⁹⁰ (emphasis mine)

Antoinette Burton also provides an illuminating insight into the significance of the nation as far as gender is concerned and the complexities produced historically and theoretically:

⁸⁸ Ahmad, p.118.

⁸⁹ Ahmad, p.118.

⁹⁰ Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p.30.

[...] the return to empire reminds us that we struggle to interpret its historical significance, we need to pay more attention to the question of who needs it, who manufactures the “need” for it, and whose interests it serves. In this sense, “Who needs the nation?” might profitably be imagined as “Who can afford to need the nation?” thus writing social class, material dispossession and political disenfranchisement back into historical narratives about imperial culture.⁹¹

This ‘imagining’ is mediated across the literary arena so that gender and nation become inextricably linked in the Pakistani context, and literature is the repository through which this fissured relationship is expressed. It is not about whether the narratives of Pakistani women writers and the tales they have to relate iconically figure nationalism or are indeed part of a nationalistic ideological apparatus. The important questions focus not on how the ‘other woman’ may be erased within an ostensibly feminist project, but instead how the very existence of this woman within the gaps and silences of these texts makes possible her enunciation and provides an access to an epistemology that may, without the wider narrative, have remained repressed. The texts of Pakistani women writers intervene in the discourse of nationalism in myriad ways, so that they are historical documents in their own right. The ‘privileged’ position of these authors should not be interrogated in a way that forecloses these possibilities but rather flags up how the complex and tenuous gendered spaces of nationalism are mediated. I will now, therefore, provide a close textual analysis of a text by one of these writers in a way that brings the main concerns of this thesis into sharper focus.

⁹¹ Antoinette Burton, ‘On the Inadequacy and the Indispensability of the Nation’, in *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and Through the Nation*, ed. by Antoinette Burton (London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp.1-23 (p.6).

Gender and the Spectre of the Nation in Khadija Mastoor's 'Godfather'

The quotation from Hijab Imtiaz Ali's short story at the beginning of this introduction was taken from a recently published anthology called *Kahani*, (translated as 'story') a collection of short fiction exclusively by Pakistani women writers spanning almost six decades since the country's creation. In many ways, this illuminating text inspired the questions that are significant to this thesis and are an absent presence in the narrating of the Pakistani nation. It is important to see *Kahani* as more than just a simple recuperative project. Its editor Aamer Hussein claims that the anthology was a crucial enterprise as 'those writers who have been translated from Urdu or Hindi have been relegated to the confined spaces of academic journals' (*Kahani*, p.15). The imagining of agency for women against the backdrop of these silences and the pressures brought to bear by 'history' and the nationalism which iconically signifies it, is not as monolithic or easy to access as Hussein suggests:

Handling with equal ease the romantic and unrealistic modes inherited from past tradition, European realism, Marxist- inspired protest writing and the postmodernist strategies characteristic of our century, these writers have demonstrated that the development of fictional techniques is, in spite of ongoing ideological debate, not so much a question of conflict or opposition between realism and fantasy, tradition and modernity, but an often contradictory juxtaposition of opposites in an imaginative and linguistic crucible. (*Kahani*, p.17)

What is risked is exactly the kind of canonisation that Hussein alluded to earlier, where the work of these writers, it seems, can only be read within those overarching theoretical frameworks it figures as absence in. The problems with this approach are apparent in the 'underwater monsters' that the oeuvre of an author like Hijab Imtiaz Ali represents. There was no clear break between 'romantic and unrealistic modes' and the appropriation of 'European realism'. Ali's story is very much part of the

milieu from which the romantic traditions of Urdu storytelling emerged. Its main protagonists are middle-class women who have led a privileged lifestyle with all the benefits of the social mobility and freedom of movement that this brings. Zulfie and Roohi both attend parties where they are free to interact with men and drink alcohol. And yet the 'contradictions' preventing any sort of hegemonic ideology being reinforced exist in the narrative's tenuous awareness of the 'underwater monsters' that may be haunting even the hallowed spaces of the privileged. These not only expose the precarious false consciousness of Zulfie's world, where her existence has become increasingly defined by an alcoholic husband, expressed ironically by his dependence on her. They also threaten to escape their own narrative limits by producing those 'other women' that the story ostensibly forgets, those women who are not as privileged as Zulfie, who on a daily basis feel the material consequences of a violence that for her is implicit, and state inequalities that she enjoys the benefits of. Agency, therefore, is always contingent, and the fashioning of it in any concrete way is something that a gendered 'history' simply will not allow; the slippages that are produced cannot be contained. The litany of discourses that Hussein rolls out, from 'postmodernist' to 'Marxist', all have their own gaps and silences. And yet they are discussed as if Pakistani women writers whose work was previously the site of discursive violence are now suddenly included in the very structures that enacted this violence. Whether these theoretical paradigms provide a useful critical methodology through which to approach these texts is of course, a different matter, as is the apparent employing of them strategically by the authors themselves. The point is that 'irreconcilable elements' do not become reconciled in any of these narratives. If there is any common thread across these texts, it is the way gender intervenes to create dissonance rather than figure as a repository for another 'history' that forecloses. The

‘mothers of the disappeared’ will not allow the nation to forget, even if some of the narratives within the anthology may have pretensions to do so. The complex nature of agency for Pakistani women, therefore, is mediated across these various historical, political and literary points. And more often than not, for the reasons already discussed, where postcolonial and neo-colonial academic ‘history’ elide and the fabric of the text is also a site of potential invisibilities and alienation, agency is the space of deferral rather than enunciation.

It is against these nuanced considerations that ‘Godfather’ should be read. The author of this short story is Khadija Mastoor, who began writing in the forties, having spent her formative years around the literary milieu of Chughtai, Jahan and the PWA.⁹² It is a narrative that appears to epitomise the problems of imagining a gendered agency against a ‘history’ and nationalist ideology that does not seem to permit any such intervention. In Mastoor’s story, these paradigms begin to unravel to reveal their contingencies, which are consciously interrogated. And indeed once this occurs, the binary between political conscious and unconscious cannot be easily reinforced, whereby gender is acknowledged as ‘other’, confronted and then seamlessly confined yet again to the borders of the hegemonic. Such dissonance arrives here in the form of the eponymous heroine of Mastoor’s tale, Godfather, a working-class Pakistani woman who, following a troubled youth is quickly married off by her parents. At this point she finds herself at the periphery of her husband’s attentions, locked in a competing battle with her mother-in-law. Finally losing her patience, she enacts a violent revenge against her husband’s mother and whilst pregnant, is subsequently disowned and made homeless by her husband, who also takes her child once it is born and remarries. After being violently abandoned, she

⁹² Khadija Mastoor, ‘Godfather’, in *Kahani: Short Stories by Pakistani Women*, ed. by Aamer Hussein (London: Saqi, 2005), pp.31-46. Subsequent references to the short story are within the main body of the thesis in parenthesis and are from this edition.

joins the ranks of a group of petty criminals, develops a fondness for cannabis, and begins to climb their hierarchy, assuming the title of *Godfather* with an ease that belies her previously marginalised social status. Mastoor begins her story with a temporal reversal, where her protagonist's past is relayed in flashback and Godfather murders a policeman who attempts to subject her to the sort of patriarchal violence that has permeated her life, and that she appears to have successfully negotiated. Gender in this narrative straddles several jarring intersections where agency can be potentially fashioned. Each of these points, however, is as precarious as the story's conspicuously 'anti-realist' style, initially apparent in the adoption of a non-linear temporal sequence of events. This repudiation of a well worn literary formula has resonance beyond the purely stylistic. The disavowal of linearity here is an oppositional strategy, establishing the framework for the narration of an alternative epistemology and history which exists outside the conventional past, present, future paradigm. The transformative potential of gender in the narrative can be traced through the several stages of Godfather's life. In the dramatic opening events she is 'oblivious to the sounds and whistles' of the mainly male crowd, stalking the streets as 'the metal head of her walking stick ground the tarmac and her heavy, masculine boots made a racket' (p.31). The emphasis on the 'masculine' trappings Godfather chooses to express her gendered performance exposes the contingent nature of the male, patriarchal sign, so crucial to the narration of Pakistani history. Here, gender loses its fixity and the puzzled onlookers, as well as institutionalised patriarchy in the form of the police, do not seem to know how to respond:

The sentry ogled her, amazed. Such a strapping figure of a woman, stick in hand, wearing men's shoes and a big loose shirt, enormous, wide-trousered *shalwar* and no *dupatta*. ('Godfather', p.31)

The sentry's gaze reconfigures what it sees, perceiving its object in hyper- masculine, hyper-phallic terms. And yet there is more at stake than a rudimentary mimesis of male authority. What Mastoor's protagonist enacts instead is a challenge to the essentialism of that authority by reproducing its own signifiers. In this way, the policeman can do nothing more than replicate the cartography of a previously stable gendered ideology, so that it is immensely peculiar to him that the Godfather has exchanged the conventional female garb of a *shalwar* (loose, baggy flannels for women) and *dupatta* (a head covering for women different to the Islamic *Hijab* essentially being a light shawl draped over the head for modesty in the presence of men) for equally conventional male attire. The point is that even as he attempts to reapply some sort of patriarchal norm to what he is witnessing, the signifiers of that very norm have been destabilised through a material performance, and lack the essentialism that concretised them. The 'living, pulsing blood' of the policeman as her stick 'scattered his brain around' emphatically brings Godfather's challenge into sharp focus (p.32). Her intervention is more than just an appropriation, but a re-imagining and re-mapping of the very structures that would seek to silence her, structures that turn in on themselves as their wider meaning loses its fixity, culminating in violent upheaval. Such transformations pervade the story. In her early years, Godfather was 'Kaneez', a poor daughter from a large family who 'never had a stomachful to eat' (p.33). This part of her life sees Kaneez treating her family as she later would do her jailers, where attempts to marginalise her were met with 'the smashing of clay pots and containers' (p.33). Her parents take drastic action and confine her to 'purdah' (the complete segregation from men and any male environments), ultimately responding as the sentry does by trying to reinforce the borders of patriarchal ideology that their daughter's behaviour is unravelling. In the end, they are relieved to find a marriage

partner for her but this merely defers rather than reinforces, where the dissonance that now permeates the political structures of the nation is transposed from the family to marriage, one institutional apparatus to another.

Where the first part of the story seemed to locate agency at the site of discontinuous performance, the second appears to re-evaluate the terms of its project. The text begins to demand a questioning of agency at the limits of performativity. Kaneez may have ‘repudiated her womanhood’ by ‘assuming the name of ‘Godfather’, the most feared and revered title in the criminal underworld, despite her lover attempting to convince her that it is ‘inappropriate for a women’ (p.38). But as her experience in prison demonstrates, it remains important to question which other epistemologies and gendered histories are on the margins of such a performance. In her case, these concerns are prompted by the final act of violence that ends her life:

The prison officers gathered round and the baby’s mother beat her breast, screaming, smashing her face with stones, falling on the floor from an upright position. Godfather’s shirt was tied tightly around her neck and the baby, lying on her breast, held her milkless teat in his mouth. Their eyes protruded from their orbs and their bodies were cold and stiff. (p.46)

Godfather/Kaneez’s life here reaches a kind of darkly subversive full circle, where she immerses herself and the baby of an inmate who presumably reminded her of what she was deprived of, in a literal *hara kiri*. Performativity here cannot efface the violence inflicted on the female body, the space where gender is enunciated most visibly. For all the destabilisation that Kaneez wrecks on the historical and national hegemonies that seek to define her existence, the most shattering and brutal discontinuity remains corporeal, inflicted on herself. Where the body was employed to carve out a precarious agency, this is once again rendered tenuous and fissured. The formative questions of this thesis then are once again brought into view. Mastoor’s

gendered intervention seems to mediate an uneasy path between framing discourses of postcolonialism: those of postmodern expressions of postcoloniality and ‘referent’ based ones, nation versus nationalism, history versus materiality. And yet gender threatens to cause the most discontinuous rupture here simply by being the liminal contingency of these various expressions of agency. The questions pervading ‘Godfather’ stem from this marginalisation in various ways. Kaneez’s/Godfather’s brutal end may emphasise how a history of violence inflicted on the bodies of Pakistani women cannot be forgotten, but it also flags up other gaps and silences which concern those women who may not have the means or the choices to perform their way to agency as Kaneez did. And of course these silences also find a space within the author’s own class position, where issues emerge regarding how ‘other women’ should be ‘narrativized’ and what is at stake when their stories are told and epistemologies enunciated. The ‘mothers of the nation’ produce a cacophony of voices and different gender positions, all destabilising totalising conceptions of Pakistani ‘history’ and announcing themselves through their very existence on the precipice of the nation. Yet this does not make them inaccessible, and it is one of the concerns of this project that postcolonial discourse, in its many guises, should produce the sort of critical methodology which negotiates the many challenges posed by the intervention of gender.

Partition, Romance and Diaspora

The first Chapter of this project establishes the historical and literary paradigms discussed as they are germane to Pakistan and explores the conflicts and debates within postcolonial discourse especially, and then locates the work of Pakistani women within this terrain. One of the shaping concerns of this thesis, therefore, is a metacritical one. After exploring the main debates underpinning nationalist and ‘postmodern’ expressions of postcoloniality, the focus turns to finding a framework through which the complex gendered interventions of Pakistani women writers can be read. The various dialogues between feminism and the different theorisations of postcolonial agency are most significant here. The work of Gayatri Spivak, Judith Butler and Elleke Boehmer especially, offer alternative approaches to viewing the complex relationship between gender, nationalism and postcoloniality. These are critiqued for the possibilities they may provide as well as their limitations in terms of reading gender politics and agency in the work of Pakistani women authors.

A significant problem is gender being potentially irreconcilable with the historical, academic and literary paradigm of the nation. Rather than conduct a chronological treatment of these writers, I wish to engage with the common threads that can be delineated across work that, in many instances, is separated by almost half a century, but engages with key historical moments when gender and nation were foregrounded. One of these is undoubtedly the partitioning of the Indian subcontinent that produced Pakistan. The violent imprint of this event on the women of that region has been well documented and will be tackled in Chapter Two of this thesis. What effectively occurred was a double colonisation that could be mapped and read corporeally, as history being played out across bodies and epistemologies. The

women of the Indian subcontinent not only found themselves as silenced in colonial and cultural patriarchies, but they figured with equally jarring discontinuity in the religious ideology driving respective Pakistani and Indian nationalisms forward. These were nationalisms which they ultimately helped to shape and anticipated would provide them with some sort of representational space and agency within the politics of the new nation. In the final analysis of course, no amount of persuasive rhetoric could salvage the idealism that essentialised the nationalist politics of Partition, which became a precarious terrain where religion could no longer elide the feudal and patriarchal unconscious it was used to promote. Women represented objects of exchange and the borders of the new Pakistani and Indian nations were forged in these tenuous transactions. Whether Muslim or Hindu, women were regularly employed as bartering tools to negotiate the retrieval of wealth between male members of the families who found themselves on either side of the Pakistani/Indian border.⁹³ In these cases religion was insignificant, as Islam/Hinduism became fluid binaries, exchanged for one another depending on whether the Muslim/Pakistani woman was relocated in a Hindu/Indian/Sikh family or vice versa. Gender powerfully exposes the ideological contingency of these constructed nationalist positions; both are unable to transcend their own materially rooted exigencies as the hegemonic religious tropes essentialising them lose their fixity. The differences sustaining Hindu/Muslim, Pakistan/India are effaced by the violent upheaval of women on both sides of the religious divide. This immensely significant moment in Pakistani history provides a useful entry point into how gender intervenes across the literary, academic and historical contexts of Pakistani nationalism. Pakistani women writers separated by

⁹³ H. Alavi, 'Nationhood and Communal Violence in Pakistan', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 21.2 (1991), 157-178. See for a succinct study on the politics of Partition and its gendered history.

generations continue to return to this moment of rupture. From a contemporary perspective, Bapsi Sidhwa, in her novel *The Pakistani Bride* (1983) thus emphasises:

The earth is not easy to carve up. India required a deft and sensitive surgeon, but the British, steeped in domestic preoccupation, hastily and carelessly butchered it. They were not deliberately mischievous- only cruelly negligent. A million Indians died. The earth sealed its clumsy new boundaries in blood.⁹⁴

Sidhwa was born in 1938 in pre-partition Lahore. *The Bride* is her first novel, published in the early eighties. Partition and its material consequences on the new nation of Pakistan, pervade her work, being a formative historical framework even as her narratives move into more recent times. As a Parsi, a small community of Zoroastrians who immigrated to India from Iran in the early nineteenth century, Sidhwa herself was fortunate enough to remain relatively unharmed by the sectarian violence that followed the ‘careless butchering’ of her country. She perhaps even benefits from being the proverbial ‘insider as outsider’. Her first published text, *The Crow Eaters* (1980), certainly foregrounds a hybridised postcolonial condition that is highly conscious of the constructed nature of cultural identity on the Indian sub-continent. But at the same time, the novel is tenuously shaped by a syncretic nationalist consciousness. There is a linear relationship between space and time in her early work and these paradigms telegraph a unified history. The ‘carving’ and its metaphorical ‘blood’ represents the blood of those that died, but also more importantly their shared ‘history’ as ‘Indians’. And this is very important because Sidhwa’s novel seems to have recourse to a dialogue with a stable historical past, in which postcoloniality is not separated across religious divisions, and everyone is

⁹⁴ Bapsi Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1990). Subsequent references to the novel are within the main body of the thesis in parenthesis and are from this edition.

homogeneously 'Indian'. This appears to be a defence mechanism to confront the bloody and fragmented present. Nationalist consciousness is what secured independence for India and it should be recuperated. History, though, particularly in this postcolonial context, is more complex and fissured. If as totalising and oppressive a framework as colonialism was sustained by its 'others', then nationalism too, as a sign, will be haunted by 'the structure of the trace' or its *différance*.⁹⁵ The stable ontology of *The Pakistani Bride*'s nationalism cannot suppress the 'traces' of those 'others' that become effaced under 'India' as totality, namely Sidhwa's own 'Bride'. The women who were displaced as a result of Partition are now staking a claim on the enunciatory space precariously occupied by 'Indian history'.

Sidhwa's treatment of the events that continue to shape Pakistani history is conducted from a retrospective position however, some forty-five years after they occurred. Interestingly, the work of writers who wrote in the immediacy of such disjunctive violence engages with the realities of a nationalist agenda and its effect on a dislocated community of women, somewhat differently. 'The Godfather' for example, was written and published at a time when the horrors of Partition were an open wound which the nation would rather forget than confront directly. The fractured body of Sidhwa's *Bride* cannot be circumvented by her text's own syncretic discourse, and Zaitoon destabilises the latter's ideological work with her marginalised presence. She is the victim of an essentialism which ostensibly seeks to represent her, but ultimately buries her voice and presence beneath its overriding structures. The harrowing experiences to which she is subjected- from being raped by her 'husband' to a specious rescue by the equally dubious institutions of the Pakistani Army and white, middle-class feminism- belie any attempt the novel makes to ingratiate her into

⁹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p.67.

a wider ideological project. Her tale will not allow nationalism to forget, and whilst Mastoor does not threaten to efface the struggles of her protagonist under a similar totalising framework, it is 'The Godfather's' body that reverberates around the text, as a dissonant site of a violence that cannot be repressed. Mastoor's text threatens to unravel under a consideration of its own historical and epistemological terms of production. The clever aporia that the gendered performance of her protagonist strikes at the logic of a nationalism which would seek to marginalise her only brings so much agency. No amount of performativity can eschew the violence inflicted on 'The Godfather's' body. It effectively narrates its own history, subverting the already compromised narrative of Pakistani nationalism, most powerfully manifest in the dead body of the story's female protagonist holding the mutilated corpse of a fellow prisoner's baby at the end. In the work of both authors therefore, separated by almost fifty years, the tale, despite its overall treatment, remains that of the silenced, gendered subject in the shape of that 'other' Pakistani woman. A gendered intervention into the nationalism that is undoubtedly a formative context in the work of these writers produces questions of agency. Whether this is fashioned via an inclusive reimagining of the nationalist map by reaching into the nostalgia of a stable 'Indian' past, or through a dissonant performance that refuses to recognise such a narrative, a consideration of gender demands that the contingent nature of this agency is recognised. Such a recognition will not allow the question of nation and gender across discourse, history and the literary practice of Pakistani women writers to be effaced. The women whose epistemologies and experiences are being narrated necessarily require an approach that negotiates the complexities this narration produces. In other words, *The Pakistani Bride* and 'The Godfather' remain alienated,

gendered voices whose position in the Pakistani nation and the postcolonial discourses that presume to theorise it, demands interrogation.

It is not the aim of this thesis however, to simply reduce these complex considerations to another example of how the nation and gender are fundamentally irreconcilable. Nationalism is clearly important to the women writers whose work I have chosen to research. The way they respond to its challenges, re-imagine and reconfigure it and the subsequent implications this has for gendered agency is what I am principally concerned with. Qaisra Shahraz is a novelist whose work highlights the sheer breadth and variety of these responses. In Chapter Three, I will be focusing on how her novel *The Holy Woman* (2001) consciously employs the tropes of populist romances that Pakistani audiences will widely recognise, to negotiate complex questions of gender and agency.⁹⁶ Her context is an immensely significant one, where nationalism evinced a ‘rebirth’ within the radical politics of religious fundamentalism under the military dictatorship of General Zia in the eighties. Her novels are concerned with how these politics are played out across the lives and bodies of the women in the Sindhi community of Pakistan. In many respects she constructs a rural idyll, a romanticised representation of life in a large Sindhi village. Questions of a feminist agency significantly remain rooted within the space of representation, which seems to empower her women protagonists in various ways. The *Holy Woman* in the title of the book is the victim of a peculiar Sindhi cultural practice, where the oldest daughter of a family, in the absence or death of a son, is forbidden from marrying to protect its wealth and assets. Similarly to a *Sponsae Christi*, she is wedded to the Quran instead, ordered to dedicate her life to its teachings and remain chaste and celibate. And yet Shahraz’s Sindhi nun enacts a performance in such a way as to short

⁹⁶ Qaisra Shahraz, *The Holy Woman* (London: Arcadia, 2001). Subsequent references to the novel are within the main body of the thesis in parenthesis and are from this edition.

circuit the patriarchal nationalist ideology that has found an expression at the most local level of Sindhi culture. Her body becomes a site through which questions of sexuality, religion and gender can all be explored at the level of representation, where agency appears to be located. This contemporary novel, written in 2001, which included a sequel, *Typhoon* (2003), published two years later, also raises interesting issues about reception and the pleasures of reading.⁹⁷ Shahraz was a much sought after scriptwriter for popular Pakistani television drama serials before she emigrated from Karachi to Manchester and wrote novels. She therefore has a keen appreciation of the power of romance fiction. Her novels carry out a textual excavation of the political unconscious of this discourse across the representation of gender, sexuality and class and against the backdrop of a rejuvenated nationalism. The salient question is how the author manages this without compromising the pleasures of reading that her novels undoubtedly offer. The serialisation in magazines for women was one of the only ways Shahraz's predecessors could reach their audiences. Her novels illuminate wider issues concerning the reception of literature and the way it was and continues to be consumed by readers who are mainly middle-class women. Restricting the literary practice of Pakistani women writers to this form effectively ensured that they remained an absent presence, a footnote in the nationalist historiography of Pakistan and the theorising of nationalism within neo-colonial academic discourse on the postcolonial. Shahraz effectively reconfigures nationalist narrativity from within its own representational limits, limits at which gender strains. Those popular serials which were previously the only way literature by these women writers could be accessed is given hegemonic expression, mediating its concerns subversively and

⁹⁷ Qaisra Shahraz, *Typhoon* (London: Arcadia, 2003).

therefore enabling an exploration of how gender intervenes and figures within Pakistani historiography, postcolonial discourse and literary practice.

The final Chapter will engage with the diasporic turn in postcolonial, Pakistani women's writing. Of particular interest is how questions of gender and nationalism, germane to the Pakistani experience, are mobilised and located within the wider discourses of diaspora and globalisation. To this end, I will be exploring three novels which I feel represent different entries in what has become an increasingly fashionable way to posit postcolonial writing. The migratory experience 'away' from Pakistani space is unpacked in Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat* (1991). And I turn to the subsequent return 'home' of the migrant in two novels by authors who I feel provide very different positions. Both Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2001) and Uzma Aslam Khan's *Trespassing* (2005) offer divergent dialogues on the gendered dimensions of global movement, and the effect this has on the shaping of an alternative (trans)national imaginary.

CHAPTER 1

FEMINIST AGENCY: IN THEORY, IN PRACTICE, IN NATIONS

The human body is always a signified body and as such cannot be understood as a ‘neutral object’ [...] Gender itself may be understood [...] not as the effect of ideology or cultural values but as the way in which power takes hold of and constructs bodies in particular ways. Significantly, the sexed body can no longer be conceived as the unproblematic biological and factual base upon which gender is inscribed, but must itself be recognised as constructed by discourses and practices that take the body both as their target and as their vehicle of expression.¹

Gendered Interventions, Nationalist Politics

It would be a mistake to assume that the work of the writers in this thesis monolithically engage with Pakistani nationalism. Considerations of gender, class, sexuality and race all inflect the complex relationships these women authors have with the specific nationalist politics they are involved in negotiating. Hijab Imtiaz Ali was one of Pakistan’s earliest, published women authors. Born in 1908, she wrote prolifically from the 1930s onwards (*Kahani*, p.168). According to Aamer Hussein, Ali was ‘a highly self-conscious novelist, a postmodernist avant la lettre’ whose writings were rooted mainly in her observations of her middle- class milieu (*Kahani*, p.10). ‘Tempest in Autumn’ employs conventional romantic tropes to narrate what can be read schematically as the conscious anxieties of ostensibly privileged, middle-

¹ Moira Gaetens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.70.

class women. Set in the 1960s, when Pakistan was under its first military dictatorship, Ali traces how seismic global movements that were finding left-wing political expression everywhere except her country, affected the position of these women. They belonged to a bourgeois intelligentsia, typically comprised of professionals rather than intellectuals. Male doctors and lawyers shape the world of Ali's women, along with the odd author and photographer, one of the husbands of the story. Despite their privileged lifestyles, Ali's story emphasises the way her characters are silenced, narrating an alternative gendered history (*Kahani*, p.10). This necessitates a re-evaluation of the role of Pakistani women not only politically, but as authors, in times when literature was employed as apparatus for a nationalist ideology that was patriarchal and defined the status of women through their bodies.

The working-class women that are a problematic absence in Ali's short fiction prominently feature in the work of her contemporary, A.R Khatun. Whilst the women in 'Tempest' are at least afforded a degree of social mobility within the confines of a class-based patriarchy, Khatun narrates the experiences of those who are the victims of both the ideological and repressive apparatus of Pakistani social structures, what Hussein describes as the state's 'economic machinery' (*Kahani*, p.10). And yet both authors negotiate their gendered interventions into nationalist politics differently. Ali's focus on 'underwater monsters' foregrounds a commitment to what exists on the margins of a class-orientated narration of Pakistani history. In the quotation from her story, Roohi is admonishing her friend Zulfie for always focusing on life's 'tidy surfaces'. This, it seems, is not the domain that Pakistani women should occupy. At least in 'dark corners, [...] underwater predators' will be visible so that it is always in this space, between the 'genuine and the fictitious', where the author and her protagonists seem to operate. Zulfie's 'underwater predator' is her alcoholic husband.

And the salient question is whether Pakistani nationalism, in its various manifestations across the country's nascent history, similarly necessitated such an existence. A liminal position, between the 'genuine and fictitious', appeared to be the only way to escape from 'the underwater predators' of nationalism's patriarchal culture ('Tempest in Autumn', p.53). Khatun's women, however, do not have the choice to enact a fluid existence that is perpetually alive to the contradictions between what is 'real' and 'imagined'. Her investment in the regenerative power of organised activism though, risks being motivated by the very ideological work underpinning the forces of a nationalism that victimises the women of her narratives.

In Theory

In order to further trace where these texts sit in relation to the tensions within postcolonial studies, it would be useful to sketch a brief overview of the debates that shape the reading of nation and gender. This dialogue can broadly be framed within the binary opposition of a postmodern and materialist approach to postcolonial theory and practice. The following quotations, by Aijaz Ahmad and Salman Rushdie respectively, introduce the issues at hand:

None of these discourses can be traced to an origin or a purpose or an interest. This history without systemic origins, human subjects or collective sites is nevertheless a history of all encompassing Power, which is wielded by none and *cannot* be resisted because there is nothing outside the fabrications of Power- perhaps ought not to be resisted, because it is not only repressive but also profoundly productive. History, in other words, is not open to change, only to narrativization.²

² Ahmad, p.130.

The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exists, like myself, at a slight angle to reality. I have found this off-centering to be necessary.... I am not writing only about Pakistan.³

What is significant in this debate as framed by Ahmad and Rushdie is how any discussion of the literary practices of the authors this thesis is concerned with is conspicuously absent. If Rushdie is the postmodern flâneur of his postcolonial generation, the ‘migrant’ who has transcended ‘history’ by ‘floating upwards from it’, then Ahmad is the watchful warden, guardian of those ‘origins, purposes and interests’ that the author’s aporia-filled pleasures seem to blissfully, or perhaps wilfully, forget.⁴ Whether or not Ahmad may have at best misread Rushdie is a moot point for the moment. Rushdie’s ‘off-centering’ may be viewed as a typically self-referential allusion to Derridian ‘logocentrism’.⁵ The author’s Pakistan, as depicted in *Shame*, is inseparable from the ‘hyperreality’ it is mediated through.⁶

Representation is the repository for history, time and space in Rushdie’s Pakistan. These are no longer essentialisms but suspended into areas where they can be reconstructed and re-imagined. This is a far cry from the explosive objections of Ahmad. Representational politics are but a corollary of global capitalism’s ever tightening grip on discrete cultural forms. Rushdie ‘floating upwards from history’ therefore, far from exposing discourses and the ideologies underpinning them for what they preclude, is actually the flâneur who ‘simply floats, effortlessly, through a

³ Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (New York: Vintage, 1984), p.24.

⁴ Dilip Fernandez, “‘Such Angst, Loneliness and Rootlessness’: An interview with Salman Rushdie”, *Gentleman*, 20 February 1984, p.75.

⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), p.42.

⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. by Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Phillip Beitchman (New York: *Semiotext(e)*, 1983), p.104.

supermarket of packaged goods and commodified cultures, ready to be consumed'.⁷ It is not as simple as a binary opposition between postmodern postcoloniality and a 'systemic', Marxist-inspired deconstruction of the latter, with an emphasis on history as stable rather than contingent. Indeed, the common thread in both positions has to be similar, that is, a general antagonism towards the colonial project and a commitment to invest its alienated victims with a degree of agency.

Taken at face value, Ahmad's Marxist dialectic seems reasonably prescient. His insistence that an 'increasing tie between postmodernism and Third-Worldist canonisations' has promoted texts by Rushdie and his conspicuously middle-class, male contemporaries at the expense of 'indigenous' works that are not so amenable to postcolonialism's postmodern lens, particularly stands out.⁸ There appears to be, in this way, a second wave of Orientalism pervading the academy, where only those postcolonial texts that conform to the tenets of postmodernism are deemed worthy of study. It would be tempting to suggest that the work of Pakistani women writers this project is concerned with represents a similarly alienated body of work. Almost immediately a binary emerges between discourses that 'float free' of politics and history, attempting to eschew colonial brutality and violence in the aporia of their representational forms, and those that espouse more concrete 'referent'-based strategies of resistance.⁹ Interestingly for Ahmad, these need not necessarily be nationalistic in character. In fact, this is exactly the kind of hermeneutic violence that the academy has wrecked upon allegedly 'third world' texts, dictating that they have

⁷ Ahmad, p.128.

⁸ Ahmad, p.80 and p.124.

⁹ Stephen Slemon, 'Modernism's Last Post' in *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism* ed. by Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (London; Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp.1-11 (p.5).

some kind of nationalist narrative defining their ideological work. Here Ahmad insists that 'a whole range of other kinds of questionings are lost', questions which concern 'experiential locations, the political affiliations of the author and representations of classes and gender'.¹⁰ The significant question to pose, however, is whether or not this position actually opens up a repository for the margins that it claims to represent. Closer interrogation would suggest that Ahmad's approach forecloses just as much as it enables, allowing glimpses of what the 'ideological supermarket' of the academy effaces, only to carry out its own very successful erasure.¹¹ Priyamvada Gopal suggests:

If Marxism serves as a constant reminder that questions of labour, systemic inequality and capitalism must remain fundamental to postcolonial studies, the latter enjoins attention to ethnocentrism, race, patriarchy and difference in unanswerable terms. What is necessitated is an intersectional mode of analysis that allows for the specificity of texts and cultural phenomena to occur without getting mired in *singularity*.¹² (emphasis mine)

Gopal's 'singularity' is similar to Ahmad's 'totality' in this instance.¹³ The problem is that in insisting on the primacy of the Marxist dialectic both critics assume the very totalising gestures that they have established robust opposition against. Ahmad's championing of 'innumerable heroisms, human bonding, resistance and decency' only serves to question who is excluded from these 'grand narratives'.¹⁴ Across history and various expressions of anti-colonial nationalisms these terms have held very specific resonance for specific groups of people whose interests they have reflected. In this

¹⁰ Ahmad, p.124.

¹¹ Ahmad, p.129.

¹² Gopal, p.8.

¹³ Ahmad, p.121.

¹⁴ Ahmad, p.139.

sense, Ahmad's 'gender' and 'class' interventions are merely paid lip service to as they become lost in a utopian expression of a seemingly benign, Marxist 'totality'. Similarly, Gopal's syncretic call for 'an intersectional mode of analysis' risks eschewing the gaps and silences that her twin evocation of Marxism and postcolonialism flags up. This is not to suggest that Rushdie and postmodern expressions of postcoloniality offer any more of an illuminating answer to the problem of how marginalised histories, such as those of Pakistani women, are to be brought into political and academic focus. It may seem attractive to unhinge essentialising culture through a conscious performativity, so that what is Pakistan becomes fundamentally unsure of itself as its contingency as an ideologically constructed space becomes exposed. The empowering potential is obvious here, especially for liminal groups. The exposure of the dependency of state and domestic patriarchy on concepts that can easily be stripped of their essentialism through performance also exposes the conditions of enclosure, and the fragile logic behind violence. Amidst the cacophony of theoretical noise, however, championing either aporia or idealistic authenticity, the silence of Sidhwa's Pakistani Bride is most deafening. To return to this novel (Sidhwa, *The Pakistani Bride*), the author's eponymous character manages to escape one type of brutalisation at the hands of her husband, to whom she was given away in order to settle a tribal feud her surrogate father was embroiled in, only to find herself at first 'rescued' by the at once benign and vicious institution that is the Pakistani army, and then shipped off to America by her First World 'other'. She is a white, middle-class, American woman who views her as an exotic, open book through which she can learn about the mysteries of the strange land carved from the Indian subcontinent. The point is that Zaitoon, the bride, did not have the choices available to her to enact a destabilising postmodern

performance. Nor was she sufficiently privileged enough to appear as anything other than the victim of a nationalism signifying 'heroism and resistance'. The historical and literary representation of her body is where discourses of nationalism and postcolonialism are mapped, and also where they reach an impasse, rooted in silence as that very body attempts an enunciation.

Narrating whose Nation?

The problems that emerge from exploring nationalism through a necessarily realist or 'systemic' mode of postcolonial criticism (whilst also positioning postmodern expressions of postcoloniality as an anathema to this criticism) have been explored. Some interesting recent studies illuminate the theoretical tensions very effectively. Nicolas Harrison suggests:

When confronting a work of fiction they [postcolonial critics] encounter two demands that can be difficult to reconcile; on the one hand they must give adequate weight to the text in its individuality and 'literarity'; on the other hand they must apprehend it from the socio-historical context from which it has emerged and in relation to which it needs, at some level, to be understood. [...] but what will become apparent is that, when one brings together different forms and levels of historicization, or different modes of attention to fiction's specificity, they may interfere with one another rather than combining into one definitive, richly historicized picture.¹⁵

Whilst he is not specifically referring to nationalism, Harrison's views are enlightening in terms of the way it is positioned across postcolonial discourses. Nationalism and its ideologies, therefore, are either part of a 'richly historicized picture' or repudiated in an approach which, having recognised the absences and

¹⁵ Nicolas Harrison, *Postcolonial Criticism* (Oxford: Polity, 2003), p.2. For other nuanced entries into this debate see: *Antinomies of Modernity: Essays on Race, Orient, Nation*, ed. by Vasant Kaiwar and Sucheta Muzumdar (London: Duke University Press, 2003), Dennis Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2011), Julie Mullaney, *Postcolonial Literatures in Context* (London: Continuum, 2010) and Rochona Majumdar, *Writing Postcolonial History* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2008).

inequalities in such a framework, focuses on expressing its politics through ‘literarity’ and the fictional text’s ‘specificity’. What is significant here is not apportioning blame, whereby the failures of various, discrete and diverse nationalisms are exposed, highlighting how they at once become ‘chauvinist, separatist and authoritarian’ post-independence, as Edward Said has emphasised.¹⁶ The line between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ nationalist ideologies cannot be telegraphed easily, and to adopt such a simplistic binary opposition to interrogate what is an extremely complex discourse would be disingenuous at best. Fredric Jameson, in his now infamous intervention in the field of postcolonialism, explains his position on how nationalism manifests itself in the literary arena:

All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel.¹⁷

Jameson has delineated nationalism specifically along geopolitical lines, as an exclusively ‘third-world’ discourse, one that resonates a more utopian sensibility against the mounting tide of postmodernism and its ‘cultural logic’, global capitalism.¹⁸ His noble intentions notwithstanding, all Jameson succeeds in achieving here, as Ahmad has emphatically exposed, is an Orientalist othering of the ‘third-world’, where a ‘knowledge’ of these ultimately diverse and heterogeneous spaces has

¹⁶ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993), p.262.

¹⁷ Fredric Jameson, ‘Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism’, *Social Text*, 15 (1986), 65-88 (p.69).

¹⁸ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p.64.

‘become bound by an act of descriptive construction’.¹⁹ Presumably therefore, the first-world reader can, without even a rudimentary interrogation of text and discourse, instantly assume that any sort of ‘third-world’ literature is essentially a ‘national allegory’, a *tabula rasa* for the relaying of that country’s experience with nationalism. Of course, Ahmad tends to wield his own ‘positivist reductionism’ when his socialist-inspired utopia threatens to enact a similar kind of totalising violence.²⁰ He does not seem to oppose the essential logic underpinning Jameson’s project, just his methodology and the way that nationalism is theorised. Jameson’s ‘nationalist allegories’ are replaced with manifestations of nationalism that are specifically socialist in colour and ‘universalist in character’.²¹ The important question is where, in this conflicting terrain, agency can be located when other pressures and epistemologies are brought to bear on Ahmad and Jameson’s totalising conceptions of the nationalist framework. If the objective of foregrounding texts that fall outside the grasp of the ‘first-world’ academy has to be to ‘reconstellate key concerns within the field of postcolonial studies’, it is also significant to ask whether such a theoretical and historical reconfiguration can be achieved if the end game will always flag up one essential totality, or universal paradigm of nationalism.²²

There is little doubt about the presence of nationalist ideology as a significant backdrop to postcolonial discourse and indeed the work of Pakistani women writers. Where the focus has to shift is from the perception of nationalism as a catch all, monolithic narrative of resistance. Other histories and exigencies, specifically those of gender and sexuality, participate, define and ultimately re-shape nationalist

¹⁹ Ahmad, p.99.

²⁰ Ahmad, p.97.

²¹ Ahmad, p.207.

²² Gopal, p.3.

historiography to emphasise what is elided as well as included. In an illuminating analysis, Stephen Slemon succinctly emphasises the difficulties of locating nationalism within the wider discourses of postcolonial studies:

[...] there is never a necessary politics to the study of political actions and reactions. But at the level of the local, and at the level of material applications, post-colonialism must address the material exigencies of colonialism and neo-colonialism, *including the neo-colonialism of Western academic institutions themselves*.²³ (emphasis mine)

Ostensibly, this critique does not seem far removed from Ahmad's or even Jameson's stance on nationalist paradigms in literature. Yet closer interrogation reveals that an empathy with and an understanding of 'material exigencies and applications' is precisely what these respective polemics lack. And the implications of this are the subsuming of the 'local' ironically at the very point that it threatens to disrupt the commonly accepted nationalist consensus.

It is interesting to note, hence, that what Anne McClintock describes as 'contested systems of cultural representations' have also become a battleground for contesting *hegemonies*.²⁴ These tensions and debates shape the formative studies of nationalism in the postcolonial context, and particularly those responses and interventions in the field that are relevant to wider Pakistani and South Asian epistemologies and histories. The influential work of Neil Lazarus is relevant here, offering a 'system' concentrating on those nationalist essentialisms that presumably foreclose and those that are fundamentally enabling:

²³ Stephen Slemon, 'The Scramble for Post-colonialism', in *De-Scribing Empire: Post-colonialism and Textuality*, ed. by Alan Lawson and Chris Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.22-47 (p.47).

²⁴ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.13.

Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World is, very obviously, premised upon the conviction that it is more useful to reconstruct by *totalization* the generative Adornian rubric of “hating tradition properly” than to jettison or relinquish it in any sense.²⁵ (second emphasis mine)

Lazarus seems to be drawing on the ‘referent’ based strand of postcolonialism to lend weight to his argument and to be fair, he has remained consistent throughout his career. This is an extract from his latest work, *The Postcolonial Unconscious*:

Postcolonial Studies emerged as an institutionally specific, conjecturally challenged response to global [...] developments. The emergent field breathed the air of the reassertion of imperial dominance beginning in the 1970s, one of whose major preconditions was the containment and recuperation of the historic challenge from the ‘Third-World’ that had been expressed for the struggle for decolonisation in the boom years after 1945.²⁶

Lazarus makes it clear that the institutionally hegemonic brand of postcolonial studies he is referring to is indeed that which has a ‘supplementarity to post-structuralist theory’.²⁷ Yet his views emerge as flawed in some significant ways. He establishes opposition against ‘the narrower sphere of “pomo-poco” scholarship’.²⁸ Apparently, it ‘turned increasingly to the subjects of metahistory and representation, tending to insist upon the epistemological indispensability of the former and the ethico-political undesirability of the latter’.²⁹ There is a distinction to be made between ‘imperialist and anti-imperialist nationalist projects and problematics’ and for Lazarus, contemporary postmodern expressions of postcoloniality have tended to perceive

²⁵ Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in a Postcolonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.9.

²⁶ Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.9.

²⁷ Lazarus, 2011, p.1.

²⁸ Lazarus, 1999, p.10.

²⁹ Lazarus, 1999, p.11.

nationalism in its anti-imperialist guise as ‘tacitly authoritarian’.³⁰ It is a ‘commitment to universalism, metanarrative, social emancipation and revolution’ that is at the heart of ‘anti-imperialist’ nationalism.³¹ There seems to be an Orientalism emerging here however, only this time undergirded by a strong appeal to the ‘superior’ grasp of history that Marxism has above all other discourses.³² It is ironic that where the ‘pomo-poco’ nexus is accused of modifying canonical theorists of nationalism ‘to be made fit for refined theoretical company’, Lazarus performs exactly the same manoeuvre with Theodor Adorno, interpreting his call to ‘hate tradition properly’ as a strategy that should be adopted in the study of nationalism as discourse.³³ And herein lies the problem, for there are those who still cannot ‘hate tradition’ and its norms properly. Indeed, there are those who exist on the margins of nationalist discourse, constantly straining at the limits of its ideology. Emancipation, ‘social’ or otherwise, is far from a material possibility for these alienated groups. Lazarus’s insistence that it was not ‘liberation movements but *colonial regimes* that resorted to the firing squad’ is, at worst, somewhat dismissive of those communities that his type of historicising seems to forget.³⁴ The cursory mentioning of class apart, his work rarely extends to a detailed exploration of those most significantly affected by the ‘egregious abuses’ of various ‘liberation movements’.³⁵ The logic here is simple. There are ‘bad’ ‘totalizations’ and there are ‘good’ ‘totalizations’. There are hegemonies that should be upheld and ones that should be challenged and overthrown

³⁰ Lazarus, 1999, p.10 and p.9.

³¹ Lazarus, 1999, p.9.

³² Lazarus, 1999, p.15.

³³ Gopal, p.3

³⁴ Lazarus, 1999, p.98.

³⁵ Lazarus, 1999, p.98.

through revolution. Nationalism is, by and large, a 'good' hegemony. However, although history may indeed posit it as integral to the struggle against imperialism and colonialism, it is not helpful to appropriate the various resistances to nationalism and ventriloquize them through what is essentially just another neo-colonial corollary. To homogenise history in this way is to deny those liminal presences that find it difficult to be heard through some kind of narrative or repository of their own. So that when Timothy Brennan claims that 'the task' of anti-colonial nationalism is that of 'reclaiming community from within boundaries defined by the very power whose presence denied community', the questions of who this 'community' refers to and whether the same presences that helped shape and define it are themselves now 'denied', have to be considered.³⁶ Across the history of Pakistani nationalism and the position of the country's women writers within it, gender seems to be one of the most significant interventions through which these issues can be explored.

When considering the literary contributions of the likes of Hijab Imtiaz Ali and Khadija Mastoor- inevitably occurring against the backdrop of anti-colonial agitation for the independent annexation of Pakistan from India- a complex relationship with the ideology of 'lost origins' begins to develop. There is a conspicuous awareness within the very textual fabric of these narratives of the pitfalls of any kind of transcendental politics. Indeed, it is often the gendered experiences they are narrating that are transcended. And yet, with the nationalist imperative a continually pervasive, postcolonial force, the retrieval of gendered silences from an ideology that potentially forecloses remains a problematic paradox. Nationalism in the South Asian and then Pakistani scenario can be viewed through such a jarring, dissonant lens. R.

Radhakrishnan proposes that:

³⁶ Timothy Brennan, 'The National Longing for Form', in *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp.44-70 (p.58).

Forced by colonialism to negotiate with Western blueprints of reason, progress and enlightenment, the nationalist subject straddles two regions of spaces, internalising Western epistemological modes at the outer or purely pragmatic level, and at the inner level maintaining a traditional identity that will not be influenced by the merely pragmatic nature of the outward changes.³⁷

Nationalism is, therefore, delineated across what is to be kept and simultaneously expelled from that 'other' epistemology of imperialism. And here the formative work of Partha Chatterjee in this field- as alluded to in the introduction- is foregrounded, where 'the imitation of the West in every aspect of life' would mean the borders of that 'other' construct, 'the East', becoming malleable and liable to be dislodged from the essentialism that sustains it.³⁸ If Radhakrishnan does not specify who is to be the guardian of this identity, Chatterjee has no such hesitation in claiming that the resolution of the 'self/other', 'outer/inner', 'East/West' dilemma played itself out across the lives and bodies of South Asian women. Nationalism 'had in fact resolved the 'women's question' in complete accordance with its preferred goals', where the 'mothers of the nation' in fact become the 'mothers of the disappeared', once again at the limits of patriarchal ideology expressed this time through a nationalist rather than imperialist framework.³⁹ If Western imitation was to be confined to the male realm, women were to be protectors of those traditions that most profoundly expressed the 'East's' difference from the 'West' as Chatterjee has suggested. And the 'emancipatory' theme that Lazarus and Benita Parry⁴⁰ seek to promote already

³⁷ R. Radhakrishnan, 'Nationalism, Gender and the Narrative of Identity', in *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, ed. by Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer and Patricia Yaeger (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.77-95 (p.84).

³⁸ Chatterjee, p.237

³⁹ Chatterjee, p.237.

forecloses the possibilities it may have promised, leaving ideology to enact a subtle interpellation and reconfiguration of postcolonial agency through its own nationalist logic. It must be stressed that several critics have found Chatterjee's theorising immensely relevant 'in the context of Muslim nationalism, leading eventually to the creation of Pakistan'.⁴¹ However, Lazarus claims that he becomes 'carried away with the righteousness of his indignation'.⁴²

A more considered response would perhaps be Achin Vanaik's insistence that the critic tends to 'slide into culturalism' and 'binary contrasts'.⁴³ Certainly it seems that this type of conception of the nationalist project in South Asia and Pakistan is susceptible to simplifying a complex phenomenon across reductive dichotomies. Particularly suspicious is how the 'West', historically and politically, seemed to be the standard bearer of progress and how all that was regressive tended to be suspended in the 'East', the realm of patriarchal violence. Yet closer interrogation reveals that Lazarus and Vanaik may have at best misread Chatterjee. This type of nationalist discourse does not involve positing any kind of 'universal history' but is instead more concerned with challenging the ideology that underpins that history.⁴⁴ So that it effectively endorses neither the 'East' or 'West' but exposes both as constructs that support a nationalism which leaves the women of Pakistan and South Asia alienated under a false guise of agency. Chatterjee's discourse on the nation remains in this

⁴⁰ Benita Parry is one of the critics that Lazarus consistently employs to reinforce the dichotomous battle lines his work has fashioned. See Benita Parry, 'Directions and Dead Ends in Postcolonial Studies', in *Relocating Postcolonialism*, ed. by, David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp.66-81.

⁴¹ Rouse, p.44.

⁴² Lazarus, 1999, p.131.

⁴³ Achin Vanaik, *The Furies of Indian Communalism: Religion, Modernity and Secularization* (London: Verso, 1997), p.187.

⁴⁴ Vanaik, p.185.

dissonant space, in between the essentialism of the latter's ideology and what it excludes. Perhaps Lazarus would prefer a cleaner break between the political conscious and unconscious so that anti-colonial nationalism's mythical aura remains intact. And yet this is rendered somewhat difficult when that unconscious is inscribed into nationalist ideology's conscious logic, rather than in binary relation to it, threatening to destabilise and haunt it with its mere presence. Ranajit Guha's assertion that 'to commit a discourse to speak from within a given consciousnesses is to disarm it' is immensely prescient here.⁴⁵ Although Lazarus may find common ground with Guha's commitment 'to the project of national liberation', his aims seem to be to reinforce rather than 'disarm'.⁴⁶ National liberation can be imagined and perceived in a number of different ways. The likes of Guha and Chatterjee allow the nation to be viewed as the domain of the marginal as well as the hegemonic, and consequently open up further possibilities to explore how gender has shaped and changed nationalist ideology in South Asia and more significantly Pakistan.

'a voice or an echoing memory?' - Performativity, Postcoloniality and Feminism in Farkhanda Lodhi's 'Parbati'

The introduction of this thesis poses a significant question when considering how to explore the work of Pakistani women writers, *vis à vis* its relationship with contemporary feminist and postcolonial theoretical frameworks. The act of refashioning, reclaiming or simply enunciating agency from within the nationalist imaginary seems to focus around the conflict between gender as consciously mediated

⁴⁵ Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p.7.

⁴⁶ Lazarus, 1999, p.119.

performance on the one hand, and the interrogation of what this postmodern route to agency excludes on the other. However, whether it is fashioned in a nationalism shaped by patriarchy, or a theoretical paradigm whose *raison d'être* seems rooted in always emphasising what is lost in such a political act, the body of the Pakistani woman becomes the discursive site upon which agency is either written or violently deferred. Such a conflict is flagged up in Farkhanda Lodhi's tale of dissonant upheaval and displacement in post-Partition Pakistan, 'Parbati':

At times one can acquire wonderful things in play, can't one? ⁴⁷

Echoing Mastoor's eponymous heroine in 'Godfather', the nature of 'play' is a fruitful identity politics and one which yields many benefits as, like Kaneez, Lodhi's protagonist manages to perform her way across communal division, and, temporarily, its violent claims on her body. However, in a similar way to Mastoor's fractious narrative, the spectre of such corporeal terror is never far away, as the heroine realises 'this earth and countries have borders and borders are guarded' ('Parbati', p.140). A performative enacting of agency here is but a momentary lapse that cannot contain what is inscribed powerfully and destructively on Parbati's body. It is interesting to note though, that the 'wonderful things play' offered emphasised the potential, however fleeting this may have been, for a more fluid geopolitics, where bodily theatrics could short-circuit the essentialisms on which nationalist ideology is predicated. Yet what is forgotten on the borders here returns. The body, in the experiences that these Pakistani women are narrating, is not necessarily textual in an

⁴⁷ Farkhanda Lodhi, 'Parbati', in *Kahani: Short Stories by Pakistani Women*, ed. by Aamer Hussein (London: Saqi, 2005), pp.119-140 (p.128). Subsequent references to the short story are within the main body of the thesis in parenthesis and are from this edition.

enabling sense. It instead becomes the site of a violent cartographical inscription. The ‘borders of’ the respective ‘countries’ that are Pakistan and India, map a bloody history which can be read on and through the body of Lodhi’s female character(s). Gender can, therefore, to return to the opening epigraph of this Chapter, be ‘understood as [...] the way power constructs and takes hold of bodies in particular ways’.⁴⁸ The significance of these comments extends beyond emphasising how ‘bodies’ are ‘only made useful and knowable within relations of power’.⁴⁹ Ostensibly, these readings may appear rather Foucauldian, where the body cannot escape the preconditions of its interpellation or, for that matter, its interpellators. However, in the specific contexts of the writing this thesis is concerned with, this body itself may be the ‘target’ and ‘vehicle of expression’ in the ‘discourses and practices’ of contemporary feminist theory, which is an immensely prescient and powerful consideration. Parbati’s demand to know ‘why’ the women around her ‘were silent’ is thus thrown into even sharper focus (‘Parbati’, p.120).

The extent to which Lodhi’s short story can be viewed through the tropes that shape contemporary feminist discourse and its increasingly tenuous conversations, is a matter of textuality. For what is being used to explore the interventions, indeed the presence, of Pakistani women across the narrative of that particular South Asian

⁴⁸ Gaetens, p.70.

⁴⁹ Jasbir Jain, ‘The Body in/ of the Text: Structure and Meaning in Women’s Narratives’, in *Gender and Narrative*, ed. by Jasbir Jain and Supriya Agarwal (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2002), pp.183-195 (p.184). Although this essay by Jain is somewhat reductive in charting how the South Asian, female body is theorised through literature, the wider anthology to which his work belongs is an invaluable contribution to what is a topic that is rarely explored in the discourse of postcolonial studies. The essays in this collection bring together broad historical and literary contexts to discuss the representation of gender in the writing of South Asian Women. Unsurprisingly, all of the writers work outside the Western Academy, mainly in Indian universities. One particularly interesting piece is ‘Producing the “Feminine Body”’: Sidhwa and Chughtai’ by Subhash Chandra. Notwithstanding the inclusion of Sidhwa in an academic context, a rarity itself, this essay provides insightful observations as to how the Indian/Pakistani female body has been produced across the 40 years and different historical and literary spaces that separate Chughtai’s *The Rock* and Sidhwa’s elusive short story, ‘The Spouse and the Preacher’, in *Her Mother’s Ashes and Other Stories by South Asian Women in Canada and the United States*, ed. by Noorjehan Aziz (Toronto: TSAR, 1994), pp.120-135.

country's nationalism and (post)coloniality is, after all, a set of texts. And yet an awareness of the status of these gendered narrations of the nation as veritable historical documents does not imply that history did not ever exist. A recognition of the mediated nature of history is not equivalent to skilfully suspending all that is 'real' into an ethereal state of 'hyperreality'. As Michael Syrotinski rightly emphasises, the initial discontinuity exposing the precariousness of mythical, historical and ideological purity is grounded in 'the inescapable necessity of reference and the contingency of historical events' that are all too 'real'.⁵⁰ The tales that Pakistani women writers have to tell and the wider population of Pakistani women they reference in these are a poignant reminder that there are 'realities' on the other side of 'reality' so to speak. Colonial violence and postcolonial violence are not separate entities, the latter somehow mythically exempt from material exigency or consequence. Where this becomes problematic is when performance becomes over determined and textuality is all that remains. Amidst the subversive potential its politics may offer, performance should not lose site of the 'contingency' it should be rooted in, a 'contingency' foregrounding the pain as well as the pleasures of aporia. Sara Suleri's "Women Skin Deep", an immensely incisive contribution to the debate, is a fruitful starting point from which to enter Lodhi's story, not least because its object of analysis is the institutionalised advocacy of rape in the Pakistani judicial system:

⁵⁰ Michael Syrotinski, *Deconstruction and the Postcolonial: At the Limits of Theory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p.31. This is an enlightening and thorough intervention into how deconstruction interacts with postcolonial discourses, including hybridity. The author both begins and ends his work by theorising that whilst postcolonialism is ultimately a deconstructive project, successive, and some would argue necessary frameworks such as nationalism, postmodernism and even gender studies jostling for representational space have made it difficult to reconcile the 'post' in postcolonial with its poststructuralist roots. A return to interrogating 'the limits' of postcolonial discourse, apparent in the work of Spivak, foregrounds an exploration of the 'dark corners' that was, after all, the *raison d'être* of such a theoretical project (p.34). This is not to suggest that other frameworks such as nationalism are no longer relevant. Syrotinski is instead appealing that they should also be challenged for what they silence, a postcolonialism fashioned from within the limits.

When feminism turns to lived experience as an alternative mode of radical subjectivity, it only rehearses the objectification of its proper subject. While lived experience can hardly be discounted as a critical resource for an apprehension of the gendering race, neither should such data serve as the evacuating principle for both historical and theoretical contexts alike.⁵¹

It is 'lived experience' that risks becoming an 'echoing memory', an adjunct to Western feminism's fashioning of a 'radical subjectivity' that becomes so divorced from its initial purpose as to mirror any other type of hegemonic discourse.

Farkhanda Lodhi's short story offers a stark reminder of how 'lived experience' cannot be easily categorised or appropriated by discourse. This narrative of dislocation, alienation and patriarchal violence straddles a slippery path between history and theory, 'voice and memory'. It tells the story of Parveen, who it is revealed is also Parbati, a spy for the Indian military constantly sent across the border to glean important information from Pakistani military and intelligence. When one of these expeditions culminates in her being wounded and raped, the army abandons her, leaving her fate in the hands of their Pakistani counterparts, at which point she is taken as 'Parveen' into a camp and married to a General who falls in love with her. A pregnant 'Parbati' is later reclaimed by her army husband on the Indian side of the border, her Pakistani spouse carrying her to the city limits before reminding her that she had 'something of his in safe keeping' ('Parbati', p.133). Upon reaching her 'real' husband, he demands that she abort her child, attempting to beat her into a miscarriage. She refuses, and when it is born, she attempts to flee back to Hassan, the father, only to be shot dead at a border she had traversed in the line of 'duty' many times ('Parbati', p.133).

⁵¹ Sara Suleri, 'Women Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition', *Critical Inquiry*, 18.4 (1992), 756-769 (p.761).

What is immediately interesting about this narrative are the many ways it can be read. The heroine's enacting of identity is indeed performative, but not to the extent that it divests itself of referential idealism, especially where nationalism is concerned. And yet this is also complicated by the fact that Lodhi herself is a Pakistani writer, imagining the contours of her character's body against a map of Indian communal nationalism. Born in 1938 in Multan, a city in the mid-west of the country, it is likely that she may have witnessed the mass internal migration and its effects, yet she herself- being a Muslim- was already living in a part of the country that had been designated to Pakistan and was not, therefore, dislocated. As a female spy, Parbati/Parveen's body already signifies nationally and with war between the two countries breaking out, she imagines for herself a representational space in this political arena:

...fresh blood poured into the city walls. Seeing their precious ones fall, these women could then raise their heads in pride and say, 'I have a share in this earth. I have drenched it with my blood. This fertile land is my being... I am earth itself. I produce gems and I swallow them as well. ('Parbati', p.133)

Images of 'blood' and 'fertility' abound, the presence of a nationalism inflected with patriarchy is apparent. And yet Parbati/Parveen's insertion into the nationalist narrative complicates the ideological. Becoming a spy to carry out active and perilous reconnaissance, her body is the site of geopolitical as well as literal inscription. It is here, however, where the rules of game seem to change. Upon attempting to violently induce an abortion, Mehta exclaims:

'Parbati! You're a woman. The Muslims call a woman fire. They are right. You are a woman. Fire. You have consumed everything, burnt it to cinders. I can't leave you. What am I to do? Parbati, Parbati! You have led Shiv astray. Humiliated him...' ('Parbati', p.139)

The sexual inscription on Parbati/Parveen's body is diametrically opposed to what is signified by her status as repository of the 'fertile' womb of India. In these terms, the sexualised nature of the female body is sanctioned and safe. The border crossing of Lodhi's heroine, however, also becomes the site of a sexual transgression. And when this occurs, the communal differences between Muslim and Hindu, India and Pakistan dissolve as Parbati/Parveen's body becomes an absent presence in the nationalist ideologies of the two countries. Mehta, therefore, is not afraid to draw on immensely powerful totems that on previous occasions emphasised ideological difference, on a symbolic level, between two warring nations. 'Fire' and the patriarchal God of the masculine 'Shiv' are at once 'burnt to cinder' by Parbati/Parveen's transgressive actions. Totems that once defined national difference can no longer be sustained. The sexualised, violated, pregnant body underlines what has been lost and is to be fought for and (re)claimed. Nationalism establishes itself through and against the bodies of Parbati and Parveen. A sanctioned crossing in the military sense, with the approval of Mehta, becomes unsustainable as Parbati's 'golden dream', a life with Hassan as Parveen, produces its inevitable presence on/in her body ('Parbati', p.134). At this point, the binary marking borders and nationalism threaten to dissolve, revealing ideologies that are contested across the bodies of not only the Parbatis of the conflict, but also its Parveens. So whilst any imagined differences may have been exposed, reduced to material, floating signifiers that Mehta seems to employ with relative ease, nationalist battle-lines have to be redrawn by the containment and erasure of the sign that has essentially fractured them. The trauma that Parbati represents is that she has returned as the embodiment of the space between herself and Parveen, the profound implications here being sexual ones that threaten to expose difference as construct.

When Mehta exclaims ‘the Muslims,’ his sworn enemies, ‘are right’ and begins to draw ideological comparisons, Parbati has brought Parveen and the ‘other side’ a little too close to home.

The performative strands of this narrative are apparent, but the significant question is whether they allude to a potentially enabling feminist intervention in their own right, or simply represent aspects of nationalist interpellation that the interpellators have crucially lost control of. It must be remembered in this case that locating agency in Parbati’s dissonant destabilisation of nationalist patriarchies that dissolves the Indo-Pakistani border, rather than separates it, runs the risk of effacing the sheer violence this process involves. For Lodhi’s heroine, such a ‘performance’ was a necessary corollary to survival. It is worth returning to the opening of the short story here:

A bullet whistled by, barely scraping her shoulder. Protecting her head, she bent over and started walking. The border was a few steps away. She had to get there. No sound but a hissing silence, a storm in the hearth and a rumbling at the core of the earth. She tightened her grip on both arms. (‘Parbati’, p.119)

Parbati has just been raped in attempting to cross the border into Pakistan as a spy. The violence inflicted on her body is part of a political performance granted, but not one that flags up any sort of powerful route to agency, just a fractured journey of the body from one patriarchy to another. The mention of a ‘rumbling earth’ has very different connotations to the ‘earth’ that Parbati imagined she was a ‘mother’ of. Her reasons for becoming a spy were motivated by wanting to ‘achieve something before I died’ and yet this is expressed in a way that appears to be interpellated by her position as a woman in the patriarchal-nationalist nexus (‘Parbati’, p.135). What is apparent, however, is the way that conventional identity politics are dislodged from their

essentialisms as she adopts her new alias of Parveen. This is indeed a process of becoming; becoming a Muslim woman; becoming an '*apa*' (Urdu word for 'big sister,' used as a generic, social term); becoming a military wife of a Pakistani general ('Parbati', p.125). These categories are exposed as being as porous as the political borders and ideologies they are based on. The traversing of the Indian/Pakistani body has necessitated a transformation that has thrown the constructed nature of identity into sharp focus. The way Parveen survives in her new space is by treating all that is in it as material and susceptible to performance, from social relations, to wifely duties, to religious identity. Of course the problem is that as Hassan somehow determines who she is and she treads the same precarious path across the border, such a mediated position becomes untenable.

There are number of significant problems with imagining an agency rooted in performativity as far as the narrative is concerned. This is a performance that is far from pleasurable for the actor. It is mired in pain and suffering and ends as it began, with violence and eventually the permanent silencing of the protagonist. One way to frame this in terms of agency is that the body vocalises *in absentia*, becoming the trace that cannot be suppressed on both sides of an increasingly tenuous divide. Yet the contradiction as far as the text is concerned is that its protagonist seems unaware of the implications of her performance. Having destabilised the ideologies underpinning nationalist politics, there is a simultaneous investment in those same politics. Whether it is a belief in utopian nationalist imperative, or a desire to be part of a 'golden dream' with Hassan that is cruelly erased, Parbati holds a stake in Parveen's hopes and fears and vice versa. These are not simply material but are invested with a reality principle that is very 'real'. What is important when locating such a postmodern identity politics in Lodhi's story is to notice how its expression of

an undoubtedly feminist orientated postcoloniality travels an uneasy continuum across nationalist ideology, performativity and a perpetual focus on marginalisation. The definite presence of performative politics, therefore, must come with a necessary caveat. Agency is not fashioned in a vacuum and even after ideologies are suspended into aporia, traces of the dispossessed and dislocated still remain, to be heard through the way they are silenced.

‘It’s a story for girls, not for boys’- Nationalism, Cultural Memory and Gender in A.R. Khatun’s ‘Grandma’s Tale’

Amtul Rahman Khatun’s story of nostalgic feminist regeneration in post(colonial), post-Partition Pakistan, throws the theoretical debate that the gendered interventions of Pakistani women authors provoke in feminist, postcolonial discourse, into even sharper focus. If ‘Parbati’ engages with nationalist ideology by producing a literary schism, which at once foregrounds the performative, the conservative and ultimately, in the end, the irreconcilability of the narrative’s quotidian violence with its feminist politics, Rahman’s ‘tale’ ostensibly fashions a more linear, iconic path between the feminist and the nationalist. ‘Grandma’s Tale’ sees the story of its main protagonist, Saliqa Begum, being narrated by the eponymous ‘Grandma’ to a clutch of excited children:

Well girls, you’ve heard all the stories I know about kings, fairies and demons: today I’m going to tell you about someone as ordinary as any of us. It’s a story for girls, not for boys. (‘Grandma’s Tale’, *Kahani*, p.84)

There is a clear separation between what can be considered purely representational in narration and an ontological reality principle. Where the latter is concerned, the story has several interesting strands. The ‘Grandma’ of the tale is clearly totemic. The ‘children’ that are the beneficiaries of her narrative prowess are not her ‘grandchildren’, but youngsters for whom she is the embodiment of the fantastical, the ‘ordinary’ and essentially the Pakistani nation in feminin(ist) terms:

‘So girls, what year was Pakistan created?’
 ‘1947,’ the girls replied in unison. ‘You think we wouldn’t know that our Qaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was the creator?’
 ‘When did he die?’
 ‘September 11, 1948,’ the girls answered.
 Grandma sighed.
 ‘Sadly, he didn’t live to see the blossoming of a new country; a one year old infant was orphaned. May God grant us protection! We need it. (‘Grandma’s Tale’, p.85)

The nation is imagined in terms of the familiar, within the dyadic confines of the family. Jinnah is the ‘Father’ and Pakistan the ‘orphan’ after his death. The story is a patrilineal one, nationalist direction such as it is stemming from the father’s political and scholarly guidance and ‘Grandma’s’ role as nurturing mother. The children of the narrative, then, are figuratively the ‘children’ of Pakistan, who will presumably be scattered and lost if the hetero-normative values invested in nationalist ideology are not reinforced. Saliqa Begum, as subject of the oral narrative, therefore bears the burden of regenerating the ‘orphaned’ nation. Hers is a tale of a different type of ‘martyrdom’ of which her husband was the victim (beneficiary) on their flight from India to the newly formed sanctuary of Pakistan (‘Grandma’s Tale’, p.86). Over the course of the narrative, Saliqa Begum struggles to bring up her children, feed them, clothe them and find menial work until finally her fortunes change as she spots an opportunity to ‘make money’ and is ‘rewarded’. The value of the ‘martyrdom’

becomes purely symbolic ('Grandma's Tale', p.90). In a similar way to her narrator, Saliqa Begum's presence is reified as totem in the wider signifying system of the national, its politics and its ideologies. As she returns to her place in national 'history' and Grandma's memory, her linear *Bildungsroman* is complete, from narrative to history, memory to reality, refugee camp to material affluence.

The way cultural memory is deployed in this story as an oral history within a literary framework is at great variance from its operation in the texts discussed previously. In 'Parbati, there is a distinct sense of it being the site of a becoming, a transformation. Cultural memory becomes the *tabula rasa* for a feminist identity (re)construction where its essentialist status is reduced to the contingent, and gendered identity is performed from within its precarious confines. Of course for Parbati/Parveen, the implications of this were powerfully political and fatally unsustainable. Rahman does not view nationalist politics in Pakistan, it appears, with the same dissonant lens. The mediation of feminism and nationalism in cultural memory here illuminates a number of interesting issues which are alluded to by Sara Suleri again:

If we allow the identity formation of postcolonialism to construe itself only in terms of nationalism and parochialism, or of gender politics at its most narcissistically ahistorical, then let us assume the media has won its battle, and the law of the limit is upon us.⁵²

'Grandma's Tale' offers a discrete textual intervention in postcolonial and nationalist Pakistani historiography precisely because it is not easily accommodated in the way cultural memory is confined to the politics of 'the limit'. The contributions of Pakistani women writers operate within their own diverse textual, contextual and political frameworks. As far as memory is concerned in Rahman's story, it would be

⁵² Suleri, p.769.

specious to dismiss it because it appears to reinforce conventional, hegemonic nationalist ideology, the 'law of the limit' performing its own essentialist manoeuvre. If anything, the enunciation of memory as reality is rather fragile and risks exposing a paradoxical instability in the beginning of the story as the girls respond to the narration by exclaiming 'this isn't a fairytale; you're just replaying old memories' ('Grandma's Tale', p.85). The mediated nature of Saliqa Begum's tale is hard to reconcile with its claim to 'truth' and problematises the linear relationship being drawn between 'reality', and how it is *related*. The story, therefore, risks becoming nothing more than the sum of its narrational parts. Cultural memory in this sense comes dangerously close to being (re)fashioned, its fixed status compromised as it negotiates a path from 'history' to fairytale. At one point, Grandma cannot withstand such an interrogation, where the only 'truth is, I think I'm becoming senile' ('Grandma's Tale', p.85). The contingency of nostalgia is enacted and eventually suspended by the performance of senility. The children question the names she employs as well which are, to all intents and purposes, analogous, representing characters in a sort of historical morality play. Saliqa Begum, thus, which in Urdu refers to one who is sophisticated, well mannered and tidy, theatrically plays out the meaning of her name. Grandma's reply again foregrounds the precariousness of what she is attempting to fashion as reality:

'What is a name? Whatever you decide to call someone. There's no point in disclosing their real names. He was martyred on the way to Pakistan, so I gave him that name'. ('Grandma's Tale', p.86)

This is not just a dismissal of her listeners' concerns but a consciously selective representation of nostalgia. The reference to martyrdom relates to Saliqa's husband's

name, which Grandma imagines as ‘Shaheedullah’, literally meaning someone who is at the mercy of Allah (God). Her tale at once becomes Saliqa Begum’s tale and, by association, the Pakistani nation’s tale. Cultural memory, it would appear, mediates between its potential materiality and contingent nature via the metonymic, to arrive at a ‘history’ which, despite such a tense negotiation, is ontologically stable.

Khatun’s investment in nationalist ‘reality’ through the ‘hyperreal’, however, struggles to contain the many complexities that the story’s skilful narration appears, initially, to have swept under its ideological carpet. These primarily concern how Saliqa Begum’s ‘lived experience’, despite an apparently seamless accommodation into the political imperative of nationalism, can reconcile itself with the Parbatis and Parveens, who essentially become extraneous to the former’s triumphalist enunciation:

Lived experience, in other words, serves as fodder for the continuation of another’s epistemology, even when it is recorded in a “contestatory” position to its relation to realism and to the overarching structure of the profession.⁵³

Where the work of a writer who is a Pakistani woman becomes epistemological ‘fodder’ within the ‘overarching structure’ of neo-colonial academia therefore, a similar type of erasure emerges, this time outside discourse, and within an ostensibly ‘contestatory’ literary practice. The ‘realism’ of Grandma’s tale produces many layers of ‘fodder’, marginalised epistemologies that can be delineated in a number of specifically ideological ways. The most emphatic of these is the way nationalist subjectivity is ultimately a very classed affair. By the end of the story, Saliqa Begum’s transformation is the site of a conscious repudiation of the under-class and impoverished aspects of her allegory:

⁵³ Suleri, p.766

Your classfellows laugh at you if you go to school with torn shoes and shabby clothes. My boy was a sensitive lad; I didn't want him to have a sense of inferiority, or to dwell on differences between rich and poor at such a tender age, and have his spirit broken. Education today is hardly geared to the acquisition of knowledge: it's a means to make money. A poor man, no matter how highly educated he may be, doesn't earn a place in society. Well, Aunt, when the month was over and I got my wages, I prepared some samosas with mince meat, gave them to the boy, and made him stand with them by the gate of the school. They sold out straight away and I made one hundred percent profit on them. [...] Our belief in the saying, 'Action reaps rewards', was justified. ('Grandma's Tale', p.90)

It is evident that the path to feminist agency within the nationalist framework is a capitalist one, involving a climbing of the classed, hierarchical ladder. The only 'society' worth entering for Saliqa Begum and her son is that of the moneyed, affluent, socially mobile classes. Khatun's protagonist plots a route to bourgeois comfort and by iconic association, social respectability through the politics of capitalism, the science of enterprise. And during this journey from dispossessed, dislocated wife of a 'martyred' husband to self-made caterer, all traces of poverty and the suffering this caused are necessarily effaced. The son should not be made aware of 'the differences between rich and poor' precisely by not being permitted to appear poor in rich or middle-class company. A normalcy is being fashioned here at the same time as Saliqa's insertion into the Pakistani nationalist arena is being imagined and narrated. The representational is indeed the material. To be, to appear, to enunciate oneself as a feminin(ist) in post-partition Pakistan involves adopting one type of (middle) classed position at the definitive expense of another. And in a further ironic twist, the poor and the marginalised, who once shared Saliqa's epistemological space, become, along with her son who peddled her samosas, part of her capitalist project and of the erasure and effacement of personal memory. When her business grows, she finds the under-classes amidst whom herself and her family once suffered and dwelled, a fruitful profit centre, 'charging them only for the bread they ate' and

making ‘the food very spicy, so you needed to eat less’ (‘Grandma’s Tale’, p.91). Cost-cutting and profiteering, the end game of which is a more acceptable social position in the nationalist imaginary, are fashioned here as philanthropy. And as the story ends with Saliqa Begum emphatically asserting that ‘If you want to be respectable, learn to make money’ (‘Grandma’s Tale’, p.94) and Grandma’s ringing endorsement of this ethos, the journey from impoverished alienation to nationalist, female subject across capitalist, social mobility, is complete.

The ‘reality’ is, of course, far more nuanced and concerns what is at stake in the performance of such narrative expediency and erasure. This is not simply a case of a Foucauldian production and simultaneously seamless management of subversion, in Khatun’s tale the ‘fodder’ will not be so easily accommodated. Whilst Saliqa Begum divorces herself from her alienated, impoverished past spent in refugee camps, exploited as servant to the bourgeoisie, the spectre of what is lost in such a manoeuvre is always there, an absent presence, foregrounded by her wise old narrator. Saliqa Begum’s suitability in ‘Grandma’s Tale’ as a subject of narrative interpellation for the Grandma’s children underscores those ‘other’ narratives of the Parbatis, the Parveens and the Kaneezes, that were perhaps not so fortunate. Theirs was a different kind of awareness of the contradictions in Pakistani nationalism’s relationship with gender, an awareness for which they suffered the ultimate penalty. In ‘Grandma’s Tale’, these voices, whose ‘contestatory’ space Saliqa Begum, it must be remembered, did once occupy, exist in the uneasy fabric of a narrative that valorises the nationalist position, and then seems to suggest that the only way women can enunciate themselves is by exercising a cold, pragmatic capitalism. Pakistani nationalism’s mythical position is immediately placed under pressure, even though, rather ironically, the feminist intervention is not oppositional or subversive. The unease gender precipitates here

affords the possibility for exposure and destabilisation through the presence of those women that such a feminist politics inevitably leaves behind. Capitalism in these terms is far from apolitical. The contingencies of Grandma's ideological tale are consciously evident, despite the narrative's attempt to confine them to the unconscious margins. Any woman who is poor, therefore, has no place in this nationalist imaginary. The approval that Saliqa's re-marriage gains for her narrator- not to mention her daughter's eventual marriage- emphasises a powerfully patrilineal dimension to the female, capitalist subject. And again, any woman who does not claim her agency in this way, indeed, need not apply. To return to Suleri then, Khatun's tale is neither 'parochial' nor the site of a transgressive, postmodern gender politics. Nationalism is clearly important to its author and rather than view its gendered intervention through such a reductive, dichotomous lens, it may perhaps be more helpful to remember this. The silences produced in the ensuing fractured jockeying for position as feminist agency is imagined in diverse, different ways become all important. So that as Grandma advises her children, the tales of 'Lady Ruin, and the mess she made of her life' share equal weight with those of the Saliqa Begums, in what becomes an increasingly fraught contest in the vocalisation of gender within the nationalist narrative ('Grandma's Tale', p.94).

‘Why were they silent?’- The Location of Pakistani Women Writers in Postcolonial (Feminist) Theory

The theoretical distinctions in the engagement with the Lodhi and Khatun narratives are evident. Yet it is not helpful to construct imaginary battle lines, only to record which camp the texts this thesis is concerned with land in first, that of Judith Butler’s brand of postmodern, third-wave feminist theorising, or Gayatri Spivak’s poststructuralist politics of suspicion. There are potential pitfalls in fashioning another reductive, binary opposition. These frameworks should instead be interrogated for how they can help illuminate the way agency is narrated against the backdrop of Pakistani nationalism. And here of course, the question of the marginalisation of the Pakistani woman writer emerges again, but this time within the very feminist paradigms that allegedly provide some kind of enunciatory space.

The work of Spivak formed the starting point for the concerns shaping this thesis. From the ideological confines of the nationalist imaginary, to neo-colonial academia, to Pakistani nationalist historiography, the Pakistani woman as writer, as subject, is the site of a violence that is epistemic everywhere. The way Spivak applies deconstruction in the political arena is significant in this sense:

[...] if the space for a change (necessarily also an addition) had not been there in the prior function of the sign system, the crisis could not have made the change happen. The change in signification-function supplements the previous function.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Gayatri Spivak, ‘Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography’, in *Subaltern Studies IV*, ed. by Ranajit Guha (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp.3-32 (p.5). It is interesting to note that Spivak did not enjoy the most harmonious of relationships with her fellow academics in the collective. Theoretical differences were bound to cause strains and these stemmed mainly from the politics of the subaltern. Whilst Spivak espoused the concept of ‘strategic essentialism’, she always stressed such a position should be constructed from a conscious awareness of what is on its margins; of what politics leaves behind. And yet this was difficult to reconcile with the Marxist based approach of the Subaltern Studies group, whose rewriting of Indian historiography through a class narrative risks losing gendered silences which, of course, were of great importance to Spivak’s work. Her intervention in this volume remains one of the most fascinating dialogues in terms of the position of gender in postcolonial

The subaltern woman, in this case, the Pakistani woman in her many guises, will always be a 'supplement' to any 'sign system' whose totality is undermined through the 'crisis' precipitated by its inability to contain its own 'supplementarity'.

Subjectivity in nationalist formations, in colonialist formations and within the academy, becomes the site of epistemic violence, always the supplement, always shifting. Any essentialist, referent based ideology cannot suppress its own *différance*. And for Spivak, this is repeated irreducibly where 'the rupture', an attempt to break ranks with one type of totalising politics, 'shows itself to be a repetition' of that very totality. The subaltern woman yet again appears as marginalised trace in competing sign systems which are ostensibly different, but patriarchies nonetheless.⁵⁵ The significant concern for Spivak is to engender within feminist studies a politics of suspicion that always attempts to elucidate what is lost rather than create its own margins. The 'third- world' woman becomes this trace, the site of epistemic violence in a feminist discourse that is inflected with specific ideologies of class, race and sexuality. The focus here is very much on remaining in between the contingent spaces, between the signifier and the signified, in the area where the traces and margins are produced. It is somewhat puzzling, then, how some theorists have interpreted these writings. Santosh Gupta reads Spivak as advocating that 'one must [...] take up an essentialist position, if only for the sake of argument'.⁵⁶ Rosemary George is even more convinced:

discourse. For a succinct and thorough exploration of her writings and theory, see, Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean, eds., *The Spivak Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1996), which also includes the referenced essay.

⁵⁵ Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (London: Harvard University Press, 1999), p.221.

⁵⁶ Santosh Gupta, 'Gayatri Spivak: Problematising/ Speaking the Margin', in *Contesting Postcolonialisms*, ed. by Jasbir Jain and Veena Singh (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2000), pp.68-81 (p.75). This is another valuable compilation from the same publishers and editors of *Gender and Narrative*, and includes a collection of essays that discuss and interrogate where South Asia as a

Much of the resistance from contemporary practitioners of theory in the west to using the subject as a trope stems from its history in the west as a part of liberal humanism. Claiming subject status for those who have been denied this privilege dramatically alters this history. There is no way that the non-subject's or subaltern's claiming of subject positions for herself can be read as "business as usual" in the world of liberal humanism.⁵⁷

While there is much that is relevant in the argument of both critics, they seem to be missing the point here. Spivak's subaltern is fairly well defined, the 'third-world' woman, victim of global capitalism's all pervasive grip on the modes of production and identity formation across class, race and gender. And yet she does not afford this subaltern subjectivity, but theorises and fashions an identity from the deferred position of the margin, a position that is acutely aware of what is lost in such an undertaking. This is what is referred to by the term 'strategic positive essentialism'.⁵⁸ If, as the two authors suggest, the subaltern adopted an essentialist position for themselves, they would not only be liable to being exposed by the same deconstructive politics, but also, crucially, they would produce their own margins, occupying the borders of the signs that communicate their 'identity', jockeying for their own representational space. In non-textual parlance, this translates into the very political situation the subalterns themselves may have been a product of, oppression, silencing, exploitation. The site of epistemic violence shifts as one sign system displaces another and what was 'rupture' becomes 'repetition'. The case of Sati, in this way, is well documented. The Indian widow disappearing across two ostensibly opposing anti-colonial and nationalist discourses, 'benevolent' and 'oppressive' patriarchies, provides a lens through which the concerns of this thesis, particularly as

literary, cultural and gendered discourse can be placed in the main debates shaping postcolonial studies.

⁵⁷ Rosemary George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.25.

⁵⁸ Spivak, 1985, p.12.

it relates to feminist theory, can be viewed. Pakistani women writers are the *différance* of myriad 'sign systems'. In accounts of the country's nationalist history their contribution is marginalised, in the theorising of nationalist movements shaping the debates within postcolonial discourse they are again absent and on the global postcolonial curriculum they represent the repressed traces of those authors that are chosen. If there is an essentialism flagged up in this tenuous politics it relates to identifying a subjectivity that is perpetually deferred, fashioned on the margins. Spivak, then, is acutely aware of the paradoxes and dangers involved in occupying her own 'sign system', her 'intent' as she suggests is never 'to suggest a formula for correct cognitive moves'.⁵⁹ In repudiating essentialist politics therefore, her work is actually extremely political.

The work of Judith Butler, though clearly working within the same poststructuralist paradigms, is perceived to have a more postmodern, political agenda. The critic herself, amidst her very deconstructive, aporia filled lexicon, issues what may be read somewhat tentatively as a theoretical call to arms:

Where the uniformity of the subject is expected, where the behavioural conformity of the subject is commanded, the refusal of the law might be produced in the form of the parodic inhabiting of conformity that subtly calls into question the legitimacy of the command, a repetition of the law into hyperbole, a rearticulation of the law against the authority of the one who delivers it.⁶⁰

Agency, for Butler, exists within the very space of 'sign and supplement' that Spivak identifies, a space that 'provides the linguistic occasion and index for a consequential disobedience'.⁶¹ Whilst this may seem rather abstract for a politics of feminist

⁵⁹ Spivak, 1985, p.335.

⁶⁰ Judith Butler, 'Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion', in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. by Anne McClintock, Amir Mufti and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1997), pp.381-490 (p.382).

agency, it does map a clear path to the end game identified in the ‘rearticulation of the law’. If the latter is an ideological system which is predicated on a flawed notion of subjectivity, flawed because of its dependence on its supplement (what it has repressed, revealing its contingency), then this very system can be short circuited and destabilised by a ‘rearticulation’, a hijacking and appropriation of the representational space it lays hegemonic claim to. Agency is fashioned within the materiality of the sign, it is ‘performative precisely because it initiates the individual into the subjected nature of the subject’. ⁶² The ‘supplement’, the ‘other’, the *différance*, is the site of an inscription, the political conscious and unconscious no longer operate in the neatly demarcated arena of signifier and signified but are inscribed within each other. The ideology sustaining gender politics is reduced to a relative material free for all, where what was previously the ‘supplement’ can liberally indulge in various ‘rearticulations’ that render the power structures sustaining the ‘sign’ completely untenable. In terms of postcolonial theory, Butler’s work shares an uncanny contemporaneity with Homi Bhabha’s influential theorising on hybridity and the postcolonial condition:

Hybridity [...] displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. ⁶³

For both Butler and Bhabha, ‘deformation and displacement’ is produced at the site of the splitting of the colonial/patriarchal sign, where it can no longer transcend its own

⁶¹ Butler, 1997, p.382.

⁶² Butler, 1997, p.381.

⁶³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.110. Bhabha’s seminal work on hybridity in postcolonial contexts and spaces is outlined in the following selections from his writings: Homi, Bhabha ‘Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism’, in *The Theory of Reading*, ed. by Frank Gloversmith, (Brighton: Harvester, 1984), pp.120-137, ‘The Commitment to Theory’, *New Formations*, 5 (1988), 5-23 and *Nation and Narration*, (London: Routledge, 1990).

materially contingent status, exposed by its inability to contain its trace or *différance*. In the postcolonial expressions of this performative politics, 'strategies of subversion' manifest themselves in the hybridised bricolage and melding of the spaces, histories and iconically marked behaviours and actions of both coloniser and colonised. This 'rearticulation' subverts by undermining any essentialist claim the colonising powers may have had to transcendental notions of history, time and space, by rendering their once sacrosanct boundaries 'visible', permeable and vulnerable to mimicry.

Bhabha's precluding, some would claim eliding, of the experience of postcolonial women in his writings is glaring. The question is whether it would be simplistic to assume, as some have, that Butler's work merely represents a feminist intervention in the debate. The issue of gender, in this sense, especially where the experience of Pakistani women writers is concerned, demands a more dialectical and nuanced approach. It seems appropriate to return briefly to Mastoor's 'Godfather'. Here, it may be recalled, the central woman protagonist employs various 'strategies' to 'turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power'. The opening scene of the novella has her deliberately planting dissonance in the patriarchal gaze from within its own limits as she stalks the streets in a policeman's uniform. Her performance is at once disturbing, at once 'parodic' and in the end it cannot be contained, culminating in violence and enclosure. Throughout the narrative, 'The Godfather' Kaneez can be viewed as challenging the patriarchal signs which seek to shape and pervade her life from within their own prescribed boundaries. Hers is a consciously destabilising performance where she is at once the criminal mastermind, the (dis)obedient wife and the unruly prisoner. Mastoor has made a feminist (re)inscription into the dominant modes of Pakistani narrative without transcending the material. Hybridity is figured in the story in such a way that all types of totalising identity politics are repudiated, with

the ideological work underpinning them reduced to nothing more than the purely referential. Bhabha does not leave much scope for the double-colonisation that, certainly postcolonial Pakistani women were confronted with in their efforts to shape nationalism on a literary and historical level. Alberto Moreiras illuminates the challenges confronting the theorising of agency within the hybridised model:

There is a steady consensus within academic cultural studies concerning the fact that reifications (or 'essentializations') of ethnicity, whether literally meant or practically used, like reifications involving gender or national identity, are not good from a political perspective, particularly because they seem to depend upon an inversion, rather than a negation, of the hegemonic positions against which they struggle. The common response invokes hybridity as a counter-concept strong enough to dissolve the dangers of either hegemonic or counter-hegemonic reification and by the same token is able to ground a sufficiently fluid politics of identity/difference that might warrant the cultural redemption of the subaltern.⁶⁴

The question of whether feminist work on identity such as Butler's and Spivak's can be located in 'hybridity as a counter concept' remains. That is whether it represents discrete feminist interventions, or is a part of a wider neo-colonial academia which effaces the presence of Pakistani women writers and the experiences of Pakistani women at the same time as it offers the possibility of 'the cultural redemption of the subaltern'.

At this point, it may be helpful to view the different possibilities for imagining agency that both Spivak and Butler offer through the lens of the female body, and where and how it figures and is represented in the work of both critics. Here it is useful to emphasise some of the similarities they both share:

[...] but if there is a point, and a fine point, to what I perhaps better understand as poststructuralism, it is that power pervades the very conceptual apparatus that seeks to negotiate its terms, including the subject position of the critic: and further, that this

⁶⁴ Alberto Moreiras, 'Hybridity and Double Consciousness', *Cultural Studies*, 13.3 (1999), 373-407 (p.373).

implication of the terms of criticism in the field of power is *not* the advent of a nihilistic relativism incapable of furnishing *norms*, but, rather, the very precondition of a politically engaged critique.⁶⁵

For both critics, subjectivity is a sign that cannot conceal its own power dynamics. Interrogating this contingency is the starting point for an ‘engaged critique’ or perhaps a way that agency can be enunciated and fashioned. Colonial, nationalist or patriarchal ideologies, in the poststructuralist sense, are ‘structures’ which cannot signify anything beyond their own ‘structurality’.⁶⁶ The female body is the *différance* which provokes this crisis. And this is where the crucial divergence in the two approaches lies- in the way the body is theorised as a site of violent inscription or enabling performativity. The dynamics of the argument can be traced back to their poststructuralist referent. Both stem from an opposition to Foucault’s deconstruction of power which itself became a totalising sign as Spivak explains:

Sometimes it seems as if the very brilliance of Foucault’s analysis of the centuries of European imperialism produces a miniature version of that heterogeneous phenomenon: management of space- but by doctors, development of administrators- but in asylums, considerations of the periphery- but in terms of the insane, prisoners and children. The clinic, the asylum, the prison, the university, seem screen-allegories *that foreclose a reading of the broader narratives of imperialism*.⁶⁷ (emphasis mine)

In his preoccupation with the dynamics of power, Foucault commits the cardinal poststructuralist sin where the discourse itself becomes a sign that ‘forecloses’, the ‘structurality’ of those interpellative spaces being exposed by ‘the insane, the

⁶⁵ Judith Butler, ‘Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of “Postmodernism”’, in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. by Judith Butler and Joan Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp.3-21 (p.6). For Butler’s other seminal works see: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (London: Routledge, 1993).

⁶⁶ Derrida, 1978, p.278.

⁶⁷ Spivak, Gayatri, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?: Speculations on Widow Sacrifice’, in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Carey Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: MacMillan, 1988), pp.290-300 (p.291).

prisoners, the children'. The 'periphery', therefore, becomes a blind spot in Foucault's theory which returns to haunt, a haunting that for both critics is inscribed across the female body. The significance of this corporeal 'periphery', in terms of the identity it is invested with, emphasises the tension between the gender politics of the performative and the politics of suspicion. For Butler, the dissonant nature of the margin and the crisis it triggers is the space where an enabling politics of identity can be constructed. And constructed is the important word here as, this identity will be forged out of a deep seated awareness of its own contingency or 'structurality'. Trinh T. Minh-ha suggests how this theoretical perspective draws its power from imagining difference not as irreducible and essentialist, but immediately permeable, where 'difference remains within the boundary of that which distinguishes one identity from another'.⁶⁸ This performance, constructed out of the material debris of the linear historical, political and spatial 'hyperrealities' that informs hegemonic and essentialist ideology, is, of course, a bodily one. Women can figure themselves towards agency by enacting and parodying what is expected of their bodies, in classed ways, in racial ways and in sexual ways. In 'Godfather,' Kaneez's stalking of the streets in what is traditionally the classed, masculine garb of a Pakistani policeman's uniform can be read in these terms, the use of the body deliberately designed to destabilise the way the patriarchal gaze 'looks' and the politics invested in this 'looking'. The binary between masculine and feminine is not so concrete anymore and has been hijacked from within its own representational space.

The female body for Spivak is an altogether different category. Whilst the 'strategies of subversion', emphasised above, foreground an undoubtedly enabling

⁶⁸ Trinh Y. Minh-ha, 'Not You/Like You: Postcolonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference', in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. by Anne McClintock, Amir Mufti and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1997), pp.415-419 (p.415).

location for the body in gender politics, she theorises it as the site where consistent and violent colonial and capitalist politics are produced. The site of splitting- where signifier is separated from signified and the tenuousness of the ideologically motivated sign is exploited- holds different implications for the body according to Spivak. Bhabha locates this moment in colonial confrontation, historically grounded in 'first contact' between coloniser and colonised, Butler in the general, fissured space of gender politics. But Spivak combines the two experiences:

[...] both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction keeps the male dominant, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.⁶⁹

The female body may figure in a violence that is textual and epistemological, but it is also the site of a violence that is epistemic. 'Insurgency' in the form of nationalist politics, traditional and cultural ideologies, may present patriarchy with an expression of agency, but this is often at the expense of violence inflicted on the female body, which finds a space in neither the colonial/capitalist nor the nationalist. The 'subaltern as female' may occupy the chasm of the split between signifier and signified, but this is not necessarily enabling. Spivak's methodology, through foregrounding the female body, does not reinforce a consideration of a route to agency for the subaltern, but instead focuses on who is excluded within such a consideration, whose narrative is elided and whose epistemology is effaced. The Derridean imperative here is always to remain within the 'structurality of structure', to be conscious of the body as *différance* rather than 'difference'. Any other type of enunciation would risk the creation of another 'structure' and with it a host of subalterns with no 'history' and also in 'shadow'. In a discontinuous way, the body, whilst not being the prop through which

⁶⁹ Spivak, 1988, p.299.

agency can be achieved, is invested with the representational signification or scriptability that Foucault would not allow. Spivak claims the Indian widow ‘wrote with her body’ in this sense, ‘as if she attempted to speak across death, by rendering her body graphematic’. ⁷⁰ The body as ‘graphematic’ is the body of the postcolonial, third-world woman as continuous trace, the violence and brutality it figures is a jarring intervention in cultural and historical memory. As Butler, therefore, alludes to the possibility of performative agency ventriloquised through this body, Spivak offers a reminder that for many postcolonial women, this may not have been a viable option, and that the only politics that can be read corporeally are those of colonial/nationalist/capitalist violence:

Although there is a desire to claim “postmodernism” as a rupture it is also a repetition. [...] When a political analysis or program forgets [...] it runs the risk of declaring ruptures in place of repetition- a risk than can congeal into varieties of totalitarianism. [...] The privileged inhabitant of neo-colonial space is often bestowed a subject position as geopolitical other by the dominant radical. ⁷¹

It may not be helpful to reduce all feminist critiques influenced by the Butlerian line to reflecting a ‘postmodern’ position, yet Spivak’s reading offers an appealing perspective on the debate. The distilling of the experiences of the third-world woman to a veritable pick and mix of identities, though rooted in contingency, risks ‘congeal[ing] into varieties of totalitarianism’, and becoming its own sign, with its own marginal traces. The tendency to put identities to market in this way, brings the body into the circulation of globalised capitalist forces which literary criticism is also implicated in. The performative route to agency in ‘Godfather’ then, is haunted by this very spectre, the bodies of those women in Pakistani history that suffered across

⁷⁰ Spivak, 1999, p.246

⁷¹ Spivak, 1999, p.317, p.323 and p.339.

patriarchal politics, across nationalist politics. This of course includes Kaneez's own and, under the weight of the history of the one that has 'no history', she hangs herself and any other (body) that can testify to the dissonant narrative she has to relate, namely the baby of her fellow inmate. In this literary intervention in Pakistani, nationalist history, it is Kaneez's body that becomes 'graphematic', writing itself into the former's 'structure' through the violence and indeed, the silence, it represents.

'Parbati' and 'Grandma' across Postcolonial Feminist Theory

A Butlerian critique of 'Parbati' is what has partly been foregrounded. Lodhi's narrative is the site of an immensely powerful bodily performance from her split protagonist(s). Parbati/Parveen's frequent border crossings under the express sanctions of Indian political legitimacy render the fabric of subjectivity, as it figures in the Pakistani/Indian nationalist imaginary, vulnerable to 'disarticulation' and appropriation. Parbati is at once an Indian spy, wife to Colonel Mehta, but at the same time she can choose to be Parveen, refugee, (house)wife of Pakistani General Hassan. The contingency of both nationalist configurations has been ruthlessly exposed by a performance of those very contingencies and the exigencies that sustain them. If, therefore, Indian and Pakistani nationalism is narrated across and inscribed on the postcolonial, female body, in this case the body strikes back, but in such a way that subverts from within culturally, politically and nationally fixed borders:

There is no subject prior to its constructions and neither is the subject determined by those constructions: it is always the nexus, the nonspace of cultural collision, in which the demand to resignify or repeat the very terms that constitute the "we" cannot be summarily refused, but neither can they be followed in strict obedience. It is the space of this

ambivalence that opens up the possibility of a reworking of the very terms by which subjectivation proceeds- and fails to proceed.⁷²

Parbati's transgressive espionage represents danger not just on the level of the obvious threat to her life, but also at the level of signification. Every step on Pakistani soil, every moment as Parveen that she spends on the 'other' side of the binary risks destabilising the very ideologies which underpin the nationalist imaginary, and more importantly, the role of gender within the latter. Parbati suspending gender politics into the realms of the fluid and the flexible reinforces how subjectivity cannot transcend the 'constructions' which sustain it. What is significant in this case is indeed a question of signification beyond what is signified, the 'construction' of identity beyond a transcendental identity itself and the performance of the political beyond any essentialisms invested in the latter.

As has previously been outlined though, this is where a Butlerian analysis becomes problematic. For if the body is the site of agency it also, rather destructively, becomes the point at which that agency ends. Parbati's final doomed border crossing, far from liberating her, brings about her death and the end of the body, the end of a contingent subjectivity. This provokes the consideration of a number of interesting issues concerning the way agency is imagined against a very specific literary, historical and political context. One immediately, of course, concerns the body and the pleasures that performative politics provide. In Parbati's case, if some kind of agency was achieved through performance it was seldom, if ever pleasurable. In fact at every turn it was sign posted by violence, from the opening where she has quite clearly been the victim of rape, to the end where Mehta's violent attempts to abort her child leads to the final border crossing and death. Each of these junctures signifies a body in erasure

⁷² Butler, 1997, p.383

as well as a body in enunciation through the instability its presence triggers in the prevailing hegemonic, nationalist ideology. And whether Parbati/Parveen's performance is conscious at all is a moot point as well. As my analysis above indicates, the narrative is very ambivalent on nationalism and the position of Indian/Pakistani women within it. At no point is there a disavowal of an overtly nationalist position, despite its unerring deconstruction. So the question really points to what is left when all is narrated and performed in Lodhi's tale or indeed how such a gendered intervention can be theorised. Elleke Boehmer emphasises the dilemma of a critic who attempts to imagine a uneasy reconciliation between Butlerian feminism and the postcolonial discourse on nationalism:

Nationalism, whether expressed as cultural self-representation or as the demand for political enfranchisement, makes its appeal, or professes to make its appeal, to all citizens equally: hence its worldwide attractiveness to feminists and reformers in quest of democratic rights. Whereas dynastic or colonial structures signify hierarchy, the controlling idea in nationalism is of a homogenous, horizontally structured society: all are equally interpellated; all theoretically participate on the same terms.⁷³

And yet as she continues to prove quite brilliantly, 'homogeneity' rarely equates to a level playing field, especially where women are concerned. Nationalism trades on an illusory reality which symbolically places women in a centrally singular position through 'cognate-metaphors of soil, earth, home and family', burying questions of gender in a politics which is not only essentialist in patriarchal terms, but also those of

⁷³ Boehmer, p.28. Throughout Boehmer's fascinating exploration of the faultlines a consideration of gender produces in the discourses of postcolonial nationalism, a curious double bind appears to emerge. Whilst she traces the myriad ways in which the nation has variously been imagined through its many women, but also at their expense, she at the same time finds it difficult to repudiate the nationalist paradigm. Whether discussing the nation as referent, or as a political framework that continues to be imperative to postcolonial expressions of agency, Boehmer insists it can be appropriated for a feminist, political agenda. Her critique is hence defined by an interesting contradiction, where her initial observations on how gender is continuously found on the margins of the nation are difficult to reconcile with her return to the same tenuous discourse when attempting to theorise gendered representation in the postcolonial context.

class, race and sexuality.⁷⁴ A necessarily gendered intervention would, therefore, risk disentangling the way the subjects of nationalism are ‘interpellated’, regardless of whether this occurs ‘equally’. The problem appears when Bohmer attempts to construe agency in Butlerian terms:

As intimated, the postcolonial novel has been dominated by historical and nationalist themes: in this respect however, it provides a pre-eminent site for active reinterpretation and contestation by women involved in telling the story of their day-to-day lives.⁷⁵

This ‘contestation’ is expressed through a ‘multivocality’ of ‘voice and babble’ which postcolonial women writers employ to ‘irrupt’ their ‘presence as both participant and observer in the re-presented, idealised nation to which they aspire’.⁷⁶ The nation, so meticulously exposed as flawed in its claims to ‘idealisation’, is suddenly reinvested with the same mythical potential. Postcolonial women ‘irrupt’ the line between public and private space that is the hallmark of patriarchal nationalist ideology, to fashion a space for themselves in the latter. It is a border crossing similar to Parbati’s and of course, similarly precarious. The nation here still ‘interpellates’, and crucially risks effacing those postcolonial women who cannot consciously ‘babble’ their way to resistance and liberation in its redrawn confines. To return to Lodhi’s text then, her main protagonist(s) remap the cartographical boundaries of their nations with fatal consequences. A hybridised feminism for them precipitates a violent reaction which they are ultimately erased under. In a similar way to Boehmer, Lodhi’s narrative also attempts to reconcile the nation with a gendered politics. But this is ultimately jarring as what is left are echoes of violent erasure rather than a slightly disconcerting ‘voice

⁷⁴ Boehmer, p.26

⁷⁵ Boehmer, p.35

⁷⁶ Boehmer, p.36

and babble' in the 're-presented' nation. Boehmer is aware of the ramifications of her critique:

In short, wherever western origin postcolonial critical attention touches down, in east or south, there is a tendency for mixing and multivocality, a feminine polymorphousness, to reproduce itself whatever the historical or cultural location (and for plainer, less adorned, realist writers to be sidelined).⁷⁷

Postmodern 'multivocality', becomes a 'referent' in the discourse of postcolonial feminism in its own right as the 'idealised' nation is fashioned. And in doing so it not only ignores the Parbatis and Parveens, whose bodies were inscribed with the consequences of such a performance, but also effaces any intervention that is not theoretically fit for purpose. In other words, a feminist politics couched in contingency becomes ideological in itself. In the end, it is 'Grandma's Tale' that produces an interesting twist in such a paradigm. The narrator's expedient 'voice and babble' exploiting the material and the 'hyperreal' in such a way illuminates how performativity can be engaged in the service of the hegemonic as well as the apparently subversive.

The critical methodology that is apparently being emphasised time and again here finds expression in the work of Gayatri Spivak. The recurring paradigm of epistemic violence, where 'whenever the margin considered itself close to the centre, the lines somehow shifted and marginality appeared once again', emerges as a fruitful line of inquiry in the texts concerned.⁷⁸ In a Spivakian sense, therefore, the politics of these narratives remain at once over determined and indeterminate as they are produced by traces and marginalities which are marked by their status as absent presence:

⁷⁷ Boehmer, p.164.

⁷⁸ Gupta, p.69

I have proposed that a different standard of literary evaluation, necessarily provisional, can emerge if we work at the (im)possible perspectives of the native informant as a reminder of alterity, rather than remain caught in some identity forever. The minute particulars of hegemonic art-critical or literary historical periodization, dependent generally on a descriptive diagnoses expressively associated with a collective mindset, foreclose moments of the axiomatics of imperialism that can only be irregularly systemised. This alternate historical narrative discloses the irregular commonality of the foreclosure, where the lines between art and fashion become indeterminate rather than the neat constructed periods of the true accounts of “history”.⁷⁹

Reading ‘in between’ the feminist interventions in the ‘neat constructed period’ of Pakistani nationalist historiography that the tales of both Lodhi and Khatun represent illuminates areas of epistemic violence or ‘foreclosure[s]’ on several interesting levels. In the case of the heroine Parbati, to coin a Spivakian term used earlier, the ‘history’ inscribed on her body becomes the veritable palimpsest through which ‘the axiomatics of imperialism’ can be seen, rendering it ‘graphematic’ of the brutality suffered by other Pakistani and Indian women. And whatever efforts are made by the author or her protagonist in attempting to achieve a ‘rupture’ from the ‘alterity’ of the subaltern, locating her violated, gendered body and epistimology in ‘the collective mindset’ of ‘identity’, inevitably culminates in a ‘repetition’. Parbati/Parveen speaks through her very absence on the margins of the various narratives that seek to silence her, on both sides of the border, as the site of corporeal inscription for two ostensibly opposed national ‘identities’. The essentialisms underpinning colonialist ‘axiomatics’ and ‘nationalist ideologies’ cannot circumscribe the trace(s) across which they previously expressed a seamless difference. The body of Parbati/Parveen echoes or repeats across this divide as an expression of what is always effaced and marginalised on the borders of ‘identity’ and ‘the collective’. But epistemic violence does not begin and end here in the story. Nationalist sentiments find their own, gendered, enunciation in ambivalent moments. And it is the spectre of a literally silenced Parbati/Parveen, as

⁷⁹ Spivak, 1999, p.352.

she attempts to make agency a reality on the other side, that is the most powerful cautionary tale against being ‘caught up in some identity forever’. The literary and historical become inseparable, indeed, Parbati/Parveen’s ordeal as written on her body is a record of history, but one that can only be read if the latter is interrogated for what it does not accommodate. And these absences do not end with the text, but pervade the literary and critical sphere, provoking significantly searching questions regarding the position of the critic, the author and their textual practice.

This dilemma is perhaps best exemplified when ‘Grandma’s Tale’ is posited against Spivak’s model and other class inflected critiques. To many, the reading of Khatun’s work, emphasising how its expression of nationalist politics was specifically ideological and specifically classed, would leave no interpretative scope outside the classically Marxist. Spivak herself suggests a ‘different agency’ can be (re)claimed if ‘*the economic be kept visible under erasure*’.⁸⁰ Yet this is quite a different strategy from other attempts to reconcile the Marxist and the nationalist, which have engendered a hegemonic discourse of postcoloniality in itself:

[...] pointing to the ascendancy in First World academia of intellectuals of Third World origin and to the role they have played in the propagation of “postcolonial” as a critical orientation begs the question of why they and their intellectual concerns have been accorded the respectability that they have. The themes that are now claimed for postcolonial criticism, both in what they repudiate of the past and in what they affirm for the present, I venture to suggest, resonate with concerns and orientations that have their origins in a new world situation that has also become part of consciousness globally over the last decade. I am referring here to that world situation created by transformations within the capitalist world economy.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Spivak, 1999, p.358, emphasis mine.

⁸¹ Arif Dirlik, ‘The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism’, in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. by Anne McClintock, Amir Mufti and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1997), pp.501-528 (p.502).

Arif Dirlik's insights are enlightening here. In many ways they relate to the critique made of Butler earlier, reflecting what appears to have become the *only* way to imagine agency for the postcolonial, 'other' woman. Moreover, there is a blind-spot regarding differences in 'history', politics and of course a consideration of that global interpellative paradigm of capitalism. As Dirlik suggests, the capitalist framework has interpellated its own intellectual practice and the subalterns/subjects who form the concerns for that practice. Yet his methodology is also questionable. Where Spivak's framework allows the working-class, Pakistani woman to enunciate her marginality in 'Grandma's Tale', exposing nationalist ideology for what it precludes, this subaltern 'subjectivity' would have been as much a site of erasure in Dirlik's theorising as it is in Khatun's story. He invests a belief in an ontologically stable 'past' and 'a nation state that has been taken for granted', and foregrounds both as legitimate sites of resistance against the 'global' colonial/capitalist onslaught.⁸² What he fails to realise, however, is that these two spaces, as 'Grandma's Tale' demonstrates, are not immune from writing their 'others' out of history. Class, in this sense, cannot, be separated from gender, a fact that Spivak is all too aware of, and one that Dirlik conveniently forgets. The lingering theoretical question is, though, that even in a critical framework as alive to its margins as Spivak's invariably is, Pakistan, its gendered postcoloniality and the literary contributions of its women, is a marked absence.⁸³ The road to agency, and the way this is theorised through the work of Pakistani women writers, lies in the faultlines of representation. Between feminism's complicity and divergence with

⁸² Dirlik, p.502.

⁸³ Throughout the body of her work and especially in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, her typically rigorous interrogation of the South Asian archive reveals epistemic violence in the collusive relationship between colonial historiography, postmodern literary criticism and global capitalism. But this is limited to India and particularly Bangladesh. In the interim period of sixty years, Pakistan and its own postcolonial encounters with nationalism, history, and an increasingly pervasive capitalist globalisation becomes the site of epistemic violence itself, a footnote in a wider Indian historiography at the limits.

material and postmodern expressions of postcolonialism, this points to a methodology that recognises *absence* and *contingency* in the imagined nation.

CHAPTER 2

NATION, NARRATION, PARTITION- A RE-ENTRY

I was six around the time it happened. I recall it well although sometimes I wish it would disappear from my mind. Our family had lived in Ambala for generations, our businesses were there, our livelihood was there. But when the violence started we had no choice, we had to migrate across the Wagah Border which separates the Punjab, to Lahore and then Sargoda. That was 1946, almost a year before Partition ‘officially’ occurred. Our village resembled an *ambaar* [large clay oven], with mobs of Sikh men sacking buildings and looting empty houses. We decided to leave at night, my family, uncle, aunt and their only daughter, who was my age. As our bullock cart made its way out through, the horses became startled by the flames from a nearby house on fire. Our belongings were scattered all over, *Abba* [Father] managed to cling to me but Afshan, my cousin, disappeared as the smoke subsided. We could not find her and were frantic, her parents were distraught with worry, they were well aware of the stories and what was the fate of young girls who were taken by the Sikh mobs. We managed to cross the border on foot, 40 miles later. Afshan’s body was discovered by our Hindu village neighbours, according to the Indian police and just the physical evidence of her body, she was abducted, raped several times, and then murdered. Nobody talks about it in her immediate family.¹

Violence is almost always instigated by men, but its greatest impact is felt by women. In violent conflict, it is women who are raped, women who are widowed, women whose children

¹ Following on from the example of many a historian and anthropologist in the discourse of Partition, I felt that the best place to begin would be within the archives of my own family. This passage has been taken from an interview I conducted with my Grandmother, who at eight years old, was a survivor of the vivisection of the Indian sub-continent as her family migrated to the newly formed Pakistan. Here, she narrates the traumatic and unfortunately all too familiar story of her cousin. The contents of our conversation have been printed with her full consent.

and husbands are sacrificed in the name of national integrity and unity. And for every fire that is lit, it is women whose job it is to painfully build a future from the ashes.²

Why had the history of Partition been so incomplete, so silent on the experiences of the thousands of people it affected? Was this just historiographical neglect or something deeper: a fear on the part of some historians, of reopening a trauma so profound, so riven with both pain and guilt, that they were reluctant to approach it?³

The Partition of Memory- Violence and Pain in the (gendered) National Consciousness

Listening and recording my very own 'Grandma's Tale' was a harrowing experience and I can therefore only begin to imagine how revisiting that fateful day must have felt for her. The majority of historical and anthropological work reevaluating the devastating impact the Partition of the Indian sub-continent had on Hindu, Muslim and Sikh women focuses on testimony as narrative. To this effect, Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin and Veena Das have all focused on vocalising the silences that pervade such violent and discontinuous experiences, as well as assessing the implications such a revision has for the way nationalist historiography and the ideology that underpins it can be read. The framework of 'trauma', as Butalia speculates in the third of the opening quotations, appears to be an attractive pathway of investigation. Yet as is apparent in her equivocal framing of a

² Gabriele Dietrich, *Some Reflections on the Women's Movement in India: Religion, Ecology, Development* (Delhi: Horizon Books, 1992), p.20

³ Urvashi Butalia, 'Community, State and Gender: Some Reflections on the Partition of India', in *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India*, ed. by Mushirul Hasan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.178-207 (p.180).

‘trauma so profound’, the act of exorcising and, for the critic or historian, investigating pain, illuminates several intriguing questions in terms of the role memory has to play in the wider, gendered narrative of Partition. With the jarring event such as a mass migration of people after the vivisection of a previously unified country, the ‘trauma’ suffered and experienced acquires various different hues. In the reverberations that follow, what also becomes interesting about pain and trauma is their ownership and to whom, if anyone, their narration belongs. The various actors, agents and chroniclers of trauma in the act of unearthing, (re)membering and then repressing it again, are all thrown into sharp focus as having (or lacking) a stake in the way cultural memory is played out across the wider political and historical landscape. The corporeal ‘trauma’ inflicted on my grandmother’s cousin and scores of other women during Partition, therefore figures to disrupt male centred nationalist historiographies of the event. The pain of recall belongs with the chroniclers, who are unable to reconcile such violent discontinuities with a seamless, euphoric account of postcolonial Independence. Ritu Menon attempts to cast some light on why this may be the case:

The great preoccupations of the human condition- freedom, nation, religion, home, friend and foe, Self and Other- are shot through with those other great themes- loss, exile, death and destruction, displacement and violence, and they compel us to look anew at those age-old borders and boundaries of nation and religion, community and identity; and at those ancient myths about shame and honour, blood and belonging. For these women who have “written” Partition, all these are open to question.⁴

The abducted, mutilated and dismembered bodies of ‘these women’ problematise the grand narratives of Indo-Pakistani Independence in several acute ways. Previously

⁴ Ritu Menon, ‘No Woman’s Land’, in *No Woman’s Land: Women From Pakistan, Indian and Bangladesh Write on the Partition of India*, ed. by Ritu Menon (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004), pp.1-11 (p.10).

hegemonic ideologies underpinning the discourses that propelled socio-religious nationalisms are suddenly 'shot-through' with a bloody violence that now always appeared to be their logical end-game. The myth, thus, has difficulty in transcending its own jarring contingencies. Under pressure from an event which foregrounds what is at stake in such an undeniably visceral and powerful way, 'nation, freedom and religion' all threaten to unravel around the gendered narrative that the corporeal, female form represents. And it appears logical, indeed vital to question, hence, whether, 'trauma', as well as belonging to the obviously broken and dislocated female voice of Partition, also defines the nationalist 'historian's' unwillingness to confront rather than their 'reluctance'. Some may argue this is even a deliberate evasion. Such an acknowledgement would expose the gendered, religious and class based rationale of separating two countries and bring the mythical imperatives of what, after all, had to be the *raison d'être* of Pakistan, into the realms of the political. 'Reluctance' then, can be more accurately described as a deliberate forgetting; a forgetting that is just as apparent in the fashioning of the cultural memory of Partition in terms of the body through which it ultimately has to be read, as it is in the recalling of the event. If however, communal, religious identity was the driving force behind the violence which occurred, the conscious foregrounding of the Muslim, Hindu, Sikh female body becomes even more potentially destabilising. As has already been discussed in the last Chapter, in relation to the short story 'Parbati', 'the sexuality of women as transgressed by abduction and forcible conversion' casts anxiety over the fixity of essentialist, religious identity.⁵ What was previously considered sacrosanct and concrete now appears vulnerable to the crudest type of inscription and change. And as Menon and Bhasin suggest, the violence that Hindu, Muslim and Sikh men subjected

⁵ Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Delhi: Kali For Women, 2000), p.110.

the women from each others' community to, with their 'all-male patriarchal arrangement of gender relations', actually emerges as a form of homo-social communication for them.⁶ A violently antagonistic act perpetrated across the body of the woman from the 'other' community, the 'other' religion, actually becomes dangerously counterproductive, illuminating patriarchal similarity between groups of violent men rather than signifying religious difference, as it was intended to. As the female body becomes the site upon which religious difference between men threatens to dissolve through the abductions and forced conversions which pervade histories of Partition, 'trauma' also significantly represents a kind of disjunctive, potentially nihilistic violence. Muslim, Sikh and Hindu religious identities collapse under the weight of their own contingencies. Possession of the female body foregrounds an epistemological crisis in their reality principles, a pain better forgotten, than re(membered).

This Chapter will be engaging with two texts by Pakistani women writers on the subject of Partition, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*⁷ and Jamila Hashmi's 'Exile', from the *Kahani* anthology.⁸ Given the profound consequences the event had for the women of Pakistan, the vivisection of the country has proved a logical and productive point of narrative re-entry for these and other, more prominent writers from the Indian sub-continent. It will be interesting to study these women authors in light of the South Asian 'canon' as it stands. As women, and then Pakistani, their work falls outside this body of texts and is diametrically opposed to it in many ways. Almost half a century

⁶ Menon and Bhasin, 2000, p.41.

⁷ Bapsi Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy Man* (Karachi: Sama, 2005). Subsequent references to the novel are within the main body of the thesis in parenthesis and are from this edition.

⁸ Jamila Hashmi, 'Exile', in *Kahani: Short Stories by Pakistani Women*, ed. by Aamer Hussein (London: Saqi, 2005), pp.105-118. Subsequent references to the anthology are within the main body of the thesis in parenthesis and are from this edition.

separate both Sidhwa's and Hashmi's accounts. *Ice Candy Man* is a retrospective narrative in this sense, with 'Exile' emerging in Partition's immediate wake, still fresh in the cultural memory of its writer and her 'new' nation. Of particular concern in terms of these texts and their narrative strategies is the way they fashion and represent the female body. Agency and absence are significant areas of inquiry. They will be read through and against the backdrop of the historical, political and nationalist processes that culminated in Partition and the problems and contradictions these presented. Agency is indeed paramount here. The discussion of trauma and the body above may have appeared, towards the end, to endorse the space of possibility that Partition violence potentially created. It is important, however, to establish distance from such a view. Attractive though it may seem, the human cost in such an ideological investment is all too apparent. Such performative, corporeal politics were accompanied by great pain, even if the women in question managed to somehow carry them out. Such a postmodern framework of feminist agency is useful, though, as a repository for theorising the body in the two texts. It is imperative to question what the implications are of adopting such a position against what is known about the realities of Partition.

Jason Francisco's claims that 'Partition fiction validates historical truth precisely in its power to represent' must, therefore, be viewed in terms of who the burden of this representation is falling on, and more importantly, what is at stake in this representation.⁹ The work of Saadat Hasan Manto, one of the most celebrated practitioners of Partition literature, especially in his short story 'Khol Do' (Open Up), epitomises the problems such a literary impasse can pose. Manto's oeuvre focuses almost exclusively on the destructive effect of nationalist politics on the divided body

⁹ Jason Francisco, 'In the Heat of Fratricide: The Literature of India's Partition Burning Freshly', *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, 2 (1996), 227-250 (p.240).

of the Pakistani woman and to this end, Partition figures prominently.¹⁰ ‘Khol Do’ maps out the central concerns of this Chapter in terms of how the female body both writes and is written upon, across Partition literature, theory and historiography. It tells the familiar story of an abducted girl, Sakina, whose father, whilst searching for her, enlists the help of a group of youths. They find her and frequently rape her before abandoning her body. The father hears a short time after of a girl resembling his daughter at the refugee hospital. The story ends with him at the side of his barely conscious daughter, being asked to ‘Khol Do’ (open the window), by Sakina’s doctor. In a Pavlovian response, she proceeds to open up her trouser strings instead, to illuminate where the real cost of the conflict lies. It is not in the outside landscape, which brings in the light from the open window, where the answers rest. They can be found in Sakina’s repeatedly violated, generative body. As a tool of agency, this body has been rendered limp and helpless. All it can do is figure and symbolise. Partition violence has reduced ideology to its bare, gendered materials, with Sakina’s body appearing as the haunting trace at the intersection of all patriarchies- whether violent or benign- at play. Her father turned to the time-honoured homo-social code in enlisting the help of the youths, but in this code’s end game the female body, Sakina’s body, appears only under violent erasure. Her final position, between men, between cultural and national geographies and politics, is an ominous one. Narrating Partition is thus seldom an exercise in playful, aporia filled, representational reality, as it becomes in that other well known tale of postcolonial joy and despair, Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. Being a woman on the Indian sub-continent in 1946-1947, one could rarely transcend the politics of identity to become an actor on its postcolonial

¹⁰ Saadat Hasan Manto, ‘Khol Do’ in *Partition Sketches and Stories* (New Delhi: Viking, 1991), pp.56-84. Reliable translations of Manto’s infamous stories are very hard to find. I am therefore grateful to my Mother and Father for their excellent work as scribes on this narrative by the Karachi writer.

stage. Existing, and remembering, was fraught with danger, as was the narration and ‘representation’ of that existence.

Embodied Nationalisms Across Local and State Cultures

What becomes apparent in the various gendered social histories of the separation of the Indian Sub-Continent is a curious convergence of the seemingly antagonistic public space of the state, and the private, local one of family. Theoretically speaking, the violence that ensued should have exposed the contingent nature of these ideologically motivated constructs. Myth, however, even when deconstructed by the sheer force of such a discontinuous historical event, cannot be so easily dislodged from discourse. The symbiotic nature through which state and family patriarchies fed off and supplemented one another ensured that a gendered, corporeal history was only visible at the site of erasure. Veena Das emphasises how this was played out in the context of Partition:

[...] codes of honour, shame, purity and pollution, hierarchy and caste, etc. all of which had been pedestallized as the special marks of uniqueness within various non-Western societies, came to be articulated both through anthropological/administrative knowledge and the practice of the state.¹¹

The way the female body was figured, imagined and (re)produced in constructions of communal Pakistani and Indian state nationalism, therefore, found a repository in the local spaces of the home and family. Gender politics were intricately mapped out across the ostensibly disparate contours of the public, ‘administrative’ government,

¹¹ Veena Das, *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.58.

and the private, 'anthropological' home. The Pakistani/Indian woman is at once 'mother' of the nation, guardian of its 'purity', a safeguard against the 'pollution' of the religious Hindu/Muslim 'other', and also symbolic of the 'honour' of her home. The public face of one powerful discourse is immediately contained within the domesticated confines of the other. It is a seamless contradiction that actually reveals the complementary nature of two opposing ideological spheres, a relationship that is both centripetal and centrifugal. Hence when an event such as Partition throws into sharp focus exactly where and how these two spaces converge, one intercedes in place of the other to tenuously reassert the status quo and redraw the boundaries through which the female body is to be represented and read. Das is referring to just such a symbiosis between spaces and ideologies in the context of Partition. The state, through its soon to become Pakistani and Indian governmental arms, distanced itself from the violence, particularly on women, seeing it as an aberration rather than the logical extension of its ideological agenda. Instead, the implications of the female body as totem were being played out at the local level, as communities attacked, abducted and exchanged the symbolic carriers of their 'honour' and 'purity', the 'mothers' and 'daughters' of their nation, the mothers and daughters of their homes. Physical pain and suffering were suspended to the realm of the symbolic as Hindu, Muslim and Sikh men enacted each others' rage and 'humiliation' across the bodies of women. In the long, drawn out aftermath, whose repercussions are still being felt to this day in terms of scores of dislocated women and children, it was convenient for the state to dismiss its private counterpart as having failed in its function. It intervened to rehabilitate and restore 'its' women, but in such a way that betrayed the same ideological work which marginalised them in the first instance. Only this time, it was the Pakistani and Indian states' 'honour' that had been compromised. The state had to

act as protector of its wronged ‘mothers’ and ‘daughters’ and temporarily, assume the role of home and world, public and private entity, though always with the latter’s ‘tacit collusion’.¹²

At this point, a gendered history of Partition consistently producing and being read through the female body as violent absence has profound implications for any literary intervention that attempts a narrative re-entry. Through the oral testimony that historians have used to produce such accounts, it can be suggested that ‘agency’ and ‘victimhood are not simply opposed categories’.¹³ That is to say, as a woman during Partition, your body *was* your subjectivity, the site of a complex matrix of politically motivated connotations across different national and local spaces. Violence may have made these more precarious, but it certainly did not prevent them from continuing to inscribe their own narratives upon the body and reclaiming it. Testimony is indeed a form of fashioning cultural memory, but neither in the story of Afshan, nor in the other oral histories of dispossessed women is there a sense that anything other than the narrative itself belongs to them. ‘Victimhood’ appears at the site of an ‘agency’ that is only present in theory. For my Grandmother, an eyewitness of the trauma, the violence that her cousin was a victim of, was not an anomaly. She was well aware, even as a young girl, that the stresses and strains of a nationalism played out across the female bodypolitik, were always present between two contending religious geopolitical spaces. 1947 saw the scars inflicted become more than rhetorical. The symbolic became the real and after the violence had subsided, there was nowhere to run except back to the ‘protective’ state or the family that may now consider their wife, daughter or mother as representing a ‘stain’ on their ‘honour’, having been raped or abducted by a rival patriarchal household. ‘Parbati’ is a literary intervention

¹² Das, p.57.

¹³ Bhutalia, p.187

that is well aware of the spectre of 'victimhood' which haunts agency. The eponymous heroine is compelled to wrestle back the tools of representation for herself inadvertently. And every performance is accompanied by the reminder of its limits, the presence of a patriarchy that is invariably authorising that very performance as Parbati/Parveen crosses the Wagah border as agent of the state. Agency in this instance arrives with a strong caveat. The imagining and construction of it in Partition literature should be acutely conscious of the discrete bodily pressures brought to bear on the Pakistani woman's subjectivity, or also risk losing her to a politics which silences.

Partition- An Historical Overview

Unbiased at least he was when he arrived on his mission,
 Having never set eyes on this land he was called to partition
 Between two peoples fanatically at odds,
 With their different diets and incompatible gods,
 'Time', they had briefed him in London, 'is short. It's too late
 For mutual reconciliation or rational debate:
 The only solution now lies in separation.
 The Viceroy thinks, as you will see from his letter,
 That the less you are seen in his company the better,
 So we've arranged to provide you with other accommodation,
 We can give you four judges, two Moslem and two Hindu,
 To consult with, but the final decision must rest with you.'
 Shut up in a lonely mansion, with police night and day
 Patrolling the gardens to keep assassins away,
 He got down to work, to the task of settling the fate
 Of millions. The maps at his disposal were out of date
 And the Census returns almost certainly incorrect,
 But there was not time to check them, no time to inspect
 Contested areas. The weather was frightfully hot,
 And a bout of dysentery kept him constantly on the trot,
 But in seven weeks it was done, the frontiers decided,
 A continent for better or worse divided.
 The next day he sailed for England, where he quickly forgot
 The case, as a good lawyer must. Return he would not,
 Afraid, as he told his Club, that he might get shot.¹⁴

¹⁴ W.H. Auden: *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), pp.803-804.

W.H. Auden's insightful and sardonic delineation of the part the British imperial overlords had to play in the vivisection of what was metaphorically and literally considered the Empire's 'jewel in the crown' only narrates a small, albeit significant, portion of this seismic event. Yet the representational framework set out in the poem is one that has proven attractive to 'official and even historical accounts' of the events surrounding the arrival of Independence and its culmination in Partition.

¹⁵ Indeed the narrative was evoked when, as described in the introduction to this thesis, Bapsi Sidhwa, in her first novel *The Pakistani Bride*, describes the British as being 'butchers', rather than the 'sympathetic surgeons' the task of dividing such a diverse, complex and contiguous country, invariably required. Appealing as it may seem, creating a colonial straw-man out of the British risks making an anomaly out of the 'ten million refugees, death of over a million people and sexual savagery, including the rape and abduction of 75,000 women', an unfortunate footnote in the pursuit of a wider nationalist imperative that not even the colonisers could stand in the way of. ¹⁶ The issue at stake in these accounts is not an exploration of what caused this violence and who it impacted, or why Partition was necessary; these are not even broached by Auden. The 'dividing' was inevitable. It was just *how* the process was conducted that is a source of virulent criticism. The British did not behave like responsible rulers should in handing over power. Their whole *modus operandi* was riddled with incompetence and insensitivity to the Muslim/Hindu and Sikh religious

¹⁵ Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, 'Recovery, Rupture and Resistance: The Indian State and the Abduction of Women during Partiton', in *Inventing Boundaries*, ed. by Mushirul Hasan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.208-236 (p.208).

¹⁶ Mushirul Hasan, 'Memories of a Fragmented Nation: Rewriting the Histories of India's Partition', in *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India*, ed. by Mushirul Hasan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.26-44 (p.34).

sensibilities they should have considered when handing out cities and townships, as Sidhwa memorably explains, ‘like a pack of cards’.

The reality of the situation of course, is far more complex than such an attractively simple and slightly specious narrative would allow. A detailed historical account of the events surrounding the culmination and aftermath of Partition is beyond the scope of this project. A delineation of the main events and their implications for the wider concerns of this thesis are imperative, however, as they form an unavoidable contextual backdrop for any literary, gendered intervention. The prominent dates of 14th and 15th August, in the case of Pakistan and India respectively, appear the most significant in as much as they officially signalled Independence. Yet as many critics have emphasised, the dawning of the ‘tryst with destiny’¹⁷ for the political elite, ‘was greeted with uneasy anticipation’ by the majority of the populace, for whom the creation of two sovereign nations along religious lines signified less of the ‘euphoria’ of freedom from colonial rule and more of an ‘aporia’ of the fear that uprooting and upheaval brings.¹⁸ Enlightened accounts by Menon and Bhasin and especially Tai Young Tan and Gyanesh Khudaisya are aware of the problems of re-entering a period of history fraught with such tension in terms of its narration and representation:

It is well known that discourses of nation-states are inevitably nurtured by *telos*. In the South Asian case the teleology surrounding independence and partition has been particularly enduring. The chronology of modern histories of Pakistan and India have been set up in such a manner that their narratives reach a climax at independence and partition. [...] In historiography partition thus remains trapped in a chronological bind which has seriously hindered an assessment of its long-term impact upon state and society in South Asia.¹⁹

¹⁷ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Independence and After: A Collection of the More Important Speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru from September 1946 to May 1949* (New Delhi: State Publications Division, 1949), pp.3-4. This is an archival document the use of which I am grateful to the British Library for.

¹⁸ Tai Young Tan and Gyanesh Khudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.74.

¹⁹ Tan and Khudaisya, p.16 and p.17.

A revision of this decidedly ideological, ‘chronological bind’, traces the stresses in the narrative of Partition as far back as 1940, when one of its principal players, Qaid-i-Azam Muhammed Ali Jinnah, first expressed the idea of ‘a two nation solution’ politically at a Muslim League conference in Lahore.²⁰ Subsequent events unravel across a bloody timeline over a year of sectarian massacres and riots as the terrified masses fought for position amidst rumours of population upheaval and dislocation. The same nationalist ‘*telos*’ that has relegated these to the ‘birth pangs’ of an adjustment to the noble struggle for Independence was now being zealously engaged by fundamentalist parties on both sides, whose desires for religious differences that had always existed to be given geographical expression were finding hegemonic vocalisation. The worst of these occurred during 1946, as the Muslim League under Jinnah grew more influential and rumours of separation amidst frantic political manoeuvrings more plausible. The areas demanded for the Muslim state included the West of Punjab, what is now present day Pakistan, and the East of Bengal, now present day Bangladesh. And the most fierce violence was to be found here, in the lead up to the public declaration of the sub-continent’s division on 3 June 1947. Violent clashes in the Muslim majority districts of Ahmedabad and Allahabad were reported in early September of 1946, and represented an accurate barometer of the Indian sub-continent’s fraught, ominous zeitgeist. Mass migration was already underway; the Muslims of India moving wholesale to what they assumed would be cities to the West of Punjab that would be ‘awarded’ to Pakistan. Indians and Sikhs who now considered themselves stranded and besieged in the West were preparing themselves for a similarly perilous journey.

²⁰ Tan and Khudaisya, p.54.

The dual political tensions at play here flag up a narrative that is far from linear, and can be better understood through an exploration of the roles of those who, in hegemonic historiographical accounts at least, are its principal actors. Jinnah has already been mentioned, but existing concurrently with him are the equally symbolic presences of Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi. What emerges is an apparently simplistic picture of the separatist Jinnah, who ‘after a humiliating defeat in 1937, took to the communal path’, forming his own Muslim League party in opposition to Nehru’s Indian Congress, of which he was initially a part.²¹ The Congress adopted for itself the role of giving Gandhi’s spiritually infused socialism a political expression under the façade of a secular, ostensibly inclusive Indian nationalism. The historical battle lines were drawn between separatist and secular nationalism, Hindu against Muslim. An initial study of Jinnah’s famous speech at the seminal Lahore conference reveals why such a political reading appears attractive:

It is a dream that Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality, and this misconception of one Indian nation has gone far beyond its limits [...] it will lead India to destruction if we fail to revise our notions in time. Musalmans are a nation, according to any definition of a nation, and they must have their homeland, their territory and their state. We wish to live in peace and harmony with our neighbours as a free and independent people. [...] Ladies and Gentleman, come forward as servants of Islam, organise the people economically, socially, educationally and politically and I am sure that you will be a power that will be accepted by everybody.²²

The rhetoric here is all too familiar. Jinnah is expounding his two-nation theory across exclusively fixed territorial lines. Religion becomes a tool for geopolitical expression, tenuously enunciated. Amidst the nationalist fervour, the problems in such a model

²¹ R.J. Moore, ‘Towards Partition and Independence in India, A Review Article’, *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 20.2 (July 1982), 189-199 (p.192).

²² Mohammad Ali Jinnah, *Quaid-I-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah Papers*, 2 vols (Islamabad: Zaidi Islamabad National Archives, 1994), 1.2. These were sourced from the University of Punjab in Islamabad and sent electronically by a cousin of mine who works at the University Library.

were already beginning to gather around its own 'limits'. To evoke a nationalist politics through religion proved a rhetorical turn fraught with ideological complexity. Islam, like the majority of religions, has never been associated with a specific territory or nation. The boundaries of the very essentialising discourse itself are flexible and permeable. Pakistan did not have a monopoly on Islam any more than England or any European country did on Christianity. This uncertainty and 'aporia' would manifest itself destructively as opposing religious ideologies jostled for position. At the level of politics, the contested boundaries were rhetorical, but they translated into bloody territorial violence on the ground.

Nationalist politics in this period however, were not ideologically monolithic. Mushirul Hasan describes how the myths underpinning the secular or the sectarian often failed to disguise political expediency:

Today, the issue is not the legitimacy of a movement but to place in perspective the dynamics of power politics in a colonial context. In fact, a rounded picture of the Pakistan movement is possible only if we contest the exaggerated claims made in the name of Islam, then and now, by the Islamists and the proponents of the two-nations theory.²³

To this extent, the trajectory nationalism took during the period of Partition was inflected with various 'power politics'. Religious identity was a driving force, but the defining factor for Hasan appears to be class orientated, where 'the clamour for a separate nation, though pressed vigorously in the post-war years with much popular backing and enthusiasm, was raised not so much by Muslim divines' but by representatives of a feudalism that was deeply entrenched in Indian society, and the nouveau riche.²⁴ 'Power politics', therefore, appear to be the preserve of those

²³ Hasan, 2000, p.34.

²⁴ Hasan, 2000, p.34.

powerful, minority groups who had the most to lose from the political status quo, both financially and in terms of their landed status. The result was a curiously flexible nationalist politics, supportive at various points of both Congress and Muslim League, of the preservation of India and its Partition.²⁵ In the sense that these influential groups had members flexing their political muscle in the main religious parties that drove the Partition movement forward, it is clear to see how the communal, the secular and the capitalist are not mutually exclusive. Rather they flow into each other, appearing seamlessly and yet also disconcertingly in one another's discourses and ideological frameworks. Hasan suggests this polymorphous and diverse nationalist landscape should 'develop a common reference point for rewriting the *histories*' of the Partition period.²⁶ Whilst it is vital to be aware of the pitfalls of generalising the myriad nationalist discourses of the period, the 'common reference point' as they 'rewrite' their 'histories' converges around the female body, and how it figures as silence in a violence that is both epistemic and real.

The decisive moment for Jinnah and his party came on 2 September, 1946 when, during a series of cabinet meetings designed to create a federal India in which a Muslim state would be devolved and given a degree of autonomy, thereby avoiding Partition, Nehru's Congress voted against proposals and more significantly, formed an interim government unilaterally, excluding all members of The Muslim League. Nehru, despite a commitment to secular nationalism, had to reconcile separatist pressures in his own camp, calling for India to be redefined along the lines of its dominant Hindu religion. His party's political manoeuvre at the Cabinet Mission made separation all but a *fait accompli*. It is similarly unhelpful, in this sense, to view Jinnah as the main agent in the unfolding historical drama. As Ayesha Jalal points out,

²⁵ Hasan, 2000, p.35.

²⁶ Hasan, 2000, p.31.

the ‘father’ of the Pakistani nation in fact may have ‘sought separate Muslim nationhood but deployed the demand to place himself on a par with Congress spokesman and so achieve equal status in the governance of a united India’.²⁷ Secularism and Separatism hence become mutually reinforcing paradigms in statecraft, a *realpolitik* across cultural and religious difference which played itself out at the territorial level, amongst populations.

It was the British who proffered the ‘solution’ of a divided country. The ‘Viceroy’ mentioned in Auden’s poem was Lord Louis Mountbatten, who occupied the seat of Imperial Viceroy in the fractious year of 1947. His brief, following the rapid decolonisation of the Empire, was to expedite Independence and he considered Partition as the only way to reconcile the growing political schism between the two parties and three religious denominations of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh. He appointed Sir Cyril Radcliffe, eponymously mentioned in the now infamous Radcliffe Awards, to begin the ‘complex and expeditious task’ of dividing up towns, cities, resources and infrastructures across increasingly fissured and porous religious borders.²⁸ He is the ‘lawyer’ of the Auden poem, and his appointment for such a task created widespread alarm. Radcliffe was neither familiar with the country whose fate lay in his hands, nor the political, cultural and religious sensibilities of its people. His Boundary Commission for this reason are often represented as the ‘butchers’ in a postcolonial narrative that sees them hastily make clumsy incisions and then leave to ‘forget’, unwilling to confront the trauma they inflicted on their injured patient. As chairman of the commission, Radcliffe was to preside over ‘two Moslem and two Hindu judges’ who each presented their case as to why the cities and towns they

²⁷ Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman, Jinnah, The Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.12.

²⁸ Tan and Khudaisya, p.79.

demanding should be awarded to them. The casting vote was his in the end, culminating in what can at best be described as a chaotic and discontinuous exercise in re-mapping. Both Hindu and Muslim delegations attempted to gain as much land for themselves as possible under the guise of a majority religious representation in the areas they demanded. The only framework, if it can be deemed as such, was the geographical blueprint of Pakistan being spread across the Muslim majority regions of Western Punjab and East Bengal, both over a thousand miles apart. Yet these diverse regions contained significant pockets of Hindu communities who had been established for generations. It was a similar story in the Indian case and on this basis, both sides attempted to claim territory outside the nominated geographical framework. In what was a thankless task, Radcliffe made his decisions in the impossible time frame of seven weeks, amidst accusations, from Muslims especially, of favouritism towards Nehru, who was close to the Mountbattens. Radcliffe, it seems, was under no illusion as to the implications of his 'solution':

The many factors that bore upon each problem were not ponderable in their effect upon each other. The effective weight given to each other was a matter of judgement, which under the circumstances threw it upon me to form; each decision at each point was debatable and formed of necessity under great pressure of time, conditions, and with knowledge that, in any ideal sense, was deficient.²⁹

Such a frank confession of the failings of these 'judgements' cannot belie their human cost. The most alarming decision made, in this sense, with perhaps the most significant repercussions, concerns the absurd choice of announcing the results of the Boundary Commission on August 17, 1947, *after* the Independence celebrations of both Pakistani and India. With rioting and communal unrest pervading the regions

²⁹ Cited in A.A. Michel, *The Indus Rivers: A Study of the Effects of Partition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p.194.

that were, at this point, only rumoured to be either Indian or Pakistani, this remarkable move on the part of the British colonial Raj only exacerbated growing uncertainty and fear. Swathes of communities were left stranded, in limbo and terrified of their destiny and the fate of their families amidst the escalating bloodshed around them.³⁰

Women, Gender and Violence in the Nationalist Equation

Before exploring the role the Pakistani and Indian State played in terms of the effect of Partition on women, it is important to briefly outline some significant, political, gendered interventions. These were made by groups of influential women on behalf of the thousands of dispossessed amongst their contemporaries, who were the real casualties of the event. On the Indian side, these included Rameshwari Nehru, who spearheaded awareness of the suffering during political sessions at the Congress and was one of the main members the of All India Women's Conference. This political symposium organised and mobilised feminist groups, large and small, to discuss how best to proceed with the very real social trauma Partition had left in its wake.³¹ On the opposite side of the border, there was the feminist arm of the Muslim League, the All Pakistan Women's Association:

³⁰ I am indebted to various anthropological and sociological studies on Partition and its effects for the historical material in this section of the Chapter. These include Tan and Kudaisya's excellent and lucid historical overview, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2000). The historian Mushirul Hasan has dedicated the majority of his career to making significant contributions to the discourse of Partition. Of particular use here were the already referenced collection of essays, *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India*, ed. by Mushirul Hasan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*, ed. by Mushirul Hasan, 2 vols (Delhi: Lotus Collection, 1995) and *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims since Independence*, ed. by Mushirul Hasan (London: Oxford University Press, 1997). From a feminist perspective, the work of Veena Das is seminal, particularly *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press). Das and her contemporaries who include Bhutalia and Menon and Bhasin make vital contributions in terms of how the female body can be theorised and viewed in relation to Nationalist and communal ideologies and political events such as the 1947 Inter-Dominion Treaty in particular.

³¹ Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, 2000, p.22.

[...] the All Pakistan Women's Association were active in arranging the marriages of all unattached women so that "no woman left the camp single".³²

There were a small minority of women, therefore, who managed to rise above the subjectivity of victimhood. Yet the above quote underlines some significant problems in terms of their role in wider state politics. Viewed in this light, the All Pakistan Women's Association appear to be representing the ideological arm of state discourse, bringing dislocated women back into the marital, patriarchal economy. These privileged, upper-class women, in their efforts to represent and rehabilitate their 'fallen', underclass contemporaries, ironically seem to have more of an affinity with the male-centred institutions they were acting with, and indeed, for.

Gendered revisions of Partition history emphasise two significant events: the violence women were subjected to itself and, significantly, the actions of the state to try to address that violence in the immediate aftermath of Independence. In their studies, Das, Menon and Bhasin both describe how border and religious tensions were expressed through the bodies of women. As discussed briefly, they were made to figure 'nationalism and its brandings'.³³ State ideology in terms of the rationale of Partition, reinforced the importance of religious identity as intrinsic to notions of 'honour' and 'purity'. At the local level these concepts were figuratively embodied by the women of the family already but were invested with an additional significance because of the religious issues at stake. A woman in these times of communal strife was no longer a symbol of the honour for the home, but also its religious credibility,

³¹ Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, 2000, p.23.

³² Sujala Singh, 'Nationalism's Brandings: Women's Bodies and Narratives of the Partition', in *Comparing Postcolonial Literatures*, ed. by Ashok Bery and Patricia Murray (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp.122-133 (p.122).

the repository for an identity that was either exclusively Muslim or exclusively Hindu. When such an ideological investment is established and cultivated over time, it is grimly unsurprising that during the communal violence that unfolded, Muslim and Hindu women emerged as the main casualties. Men on both sides, armed with such ideological as well as real weapons, were acutely conscious that the most destabilising and destructive act of violence against their religious 'other' would be an attack on their 'honour' and, by extension, the body that represented that 'honour'. In retaliation, the affected patriarchy would not respond against the male perpetrators of such an act, but deem that the most effective revenge would be a similar violation of their 'honour', which, in the communal context, also involved an attack on their religious identity. During Partition then, many women who were attacked and raped were discovered with Hindu or Muslim religious symbols 'tattooed or branded' on their 'breasts and genitalia'.³⁴ A conflict regarding contested borders and land became concentrated around the bodies of women from both sides in the most sinister kind of patriarchal one-upmanship. Masculine fantasy directed its gaze to the 'other's' essentially feminised 'mother-nation', and proceeded to stake its claim. Ideologies of 'honour' and 'purity', therefore, are corporeal, and operate to efface women regardless of what context they are employed in. And as far as agency is concerned, this violence, both epistemic and 'real', is what pervades the Partition of the Indian Sub-Continent and the creation of Pakistan. Menon and Bhasin correctly identify it in those women that were referred to as 'honourably dead' in local accounts of the conflict.³⁵ These included those who were killed by their male relatives, either brothers, husbands or uncles, to prevent them suffering what was deemed a worse fate

³⁴ Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, 2000, p.43.

³⁵ Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, 2000, p.35.

at the hands of their captors. Das describes how many women used to walk around their villages with veils of poison around their necks, which they would consume as soon as they became aware of an imminent attack.³⁶ Yet it is interesting to explore what is really being defended here, especially in the cases where the men murdered their own wives or daughters. It appears that they were motivated by a fear of the violation of their own 'honour', as symbolised by the women of the family. The body of the woman is sacrificed in the interests of preservation, rather than branded or mutilated in the interests of revenge or violation. In both cases however, it is *the body* that is at stake, and the politics of 'honour', whether employed to destroy or 'protect', still carries the same human cost. The agency of these women is at once inscribed and contained by wider patriarchal structures. The concept of 'choice', underpinning the capacity to act and the notion of identity, is ideologically governed. Indeed, there were women who are reported to have pleaded with their husbands or brothers to end their life, or those that committed suicide before the mob arrived. But to what extent were these apparently 'voluntary' choices the products of a fear stemming from an ideological interpellation, which runs so deep it defines all spheres of agency that were available to these women? In their situation, living with the 'shame' accompanying sexual violation was tantamount to death. If found, they were unlikely to be accepted by their families as many were left pregnant after being raped, and their bodies were thus the site of a very real miscegenation .

Perhaps the most significant event in this jarring equation is the Inter-Dominion Treaty of 1947, an agreement between the governments of both newly formed nations to 'recover' those women who had been abducted, undergone religious conversion against their will and who were forced to live in the 'other' country with their captors.

³⁶ Das, p.56.

In a letter to Evan Jenkins, the British Governor of Punjab, Nehru explains the state's anxieties:

There is one point, however, to which I should like to draw attention, and this is the question of rescuing women who have been abducted or forcibly converted. You will realize that nothing adds to popular passions more than stories of abduction of women, and as long as these women are not rescued, trouble will simmer and blaze out.³⁷

More than 'popular passions' however, these stories related to very real incidents, complaints of which were growing for both governments and eventually compelled them to come to an agreement. Several interesting tropes emerge in the state's own gendered intervention here. In establishing themselves as chivalric heroes in chief, the nationalist governments of both countries cleverly managed to eschew any responsibility for the violence they were now attempting to suture. The predicament of thousands of dislocated women was framed as an aberration, the victim of 'popular passions' which were normally the preserve of the private spaces of the 'home' but had unfortunately 'blazed out' into the public arena. Representational flexibility, whose motives are entirely political, therefore seems to be a 'Janus faced quality of' a 'nationalist discourse' the state is entirely comfortable engaging.³⁸ The dual tensions at play here involve those of secularity and tradition, whose discourses seamlessly overlap around the female body to affect either a rapacious rupture or a heroic rescue. The ideological timbre is the same however. As Bhutalia explains, regardless of whether the state fashioned itself as 'secular, the natural place/homeland for women

³⁷ Even Jenkins, Confidential Reports, April 1947. These are available as an archival source at the University of Punjab Library and were kindly sent to me electronically by my cousin again.

³⁸ Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, 2000, p.114.

was defined in religious, indeed communal terms'.³⁹ To this effect, the state's policy over the 'rescue' and repatriation of these women found an echo in the communal culture it opposed and blamed for their situation. Muslim women were to be returned to Pakistan, even if they were migrating from India anyway when abducted, and Hindu women sent to India regardless of whether their home may have been on the Western side of the Punjab border or the Eastern side of Bengal. What inevitably emerged was a refugee crisis, where 'fallen' women and their 'illegitimate' children were not accepted by their families, leaving them in the care and possession of the state where some remain, in designated border homes, to this day. Ultimately, they remain in a state of flux between being 'claimed' or repeatedly repudiated. Erasure, in this sense, is just as apparent in the ideological work shaping rehabilitation and rescue as it is in the brutal politics of rape and abduction:

The obsessive legal bargaining over women's bodies highlights the anxieties of nations searching for secure self-representation. [...] The investiture of the nationalistic contract on the materiality of women's bodies is of course put into place with the domains of intelligibility of the claims to legitimacy of the nascent nations.⁴⁰

When the 'materiality' of the body becomes the contested site for ostensibly opposite but in fact symbiotic patriarchies, it is difficult to imagine or locate a tentative agency in that very materiality. The state emerged as a well versed interlocutor in the various representational materials that figure in the interpellation of the Pakistani/Indian woman's agency, as is demonstrated by one Indian politician lobbying for the Inter-Dominion treaty:

Sir, our country has a tradition. Even now the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are revered. For the sake of one woman who was taken away by Ravana the whole nation took up arms

³⁹ Urvashi Butalia, p.189.

⁴⁰ Singh, p.130.

and went to war. And here there are thousands, and the way in which they have been treated [...] what-not was done to them? ⁴¹

The speaker here skilfully invokes the formative narrative of abduction and rescue in Hindu religious mythology, where the King/God Ram recovers his wife to-be Sita from the demon God Ravana, thereby bringing peace and order to the Hindu nation. The irony is that similar discourses would have been operating to legitimise the rape and abduction of those Sitas that belonged to the ‘other’ side, as well as the sacrifice of those in whom the ‘tradition’ of the nation was embodied. Where the state retrieves its ‘honour’ by employing the bodies of its women as ‘obsessive bargaining’ tools in the establishment of its own legitimacy, the same politics are invoked in the erasure of these women. The material, narrative frameworks of tradition serve to mediate a reality that further perpetuates silence. This representational apparatus may well break down under the strain of its own contingency when interrogated. But it can also be expediently employed to preserve the politics of patriarchy. The body figures ideologically across the national and local, public and private spaces of Partition history.

Choice and agency, thus became precarious concepts for these women. The state administrations of both Pakistan and India orchestrated their campaign over several years, through female social workers whose testimonies figure prominently in the gendered histories of the period already mentioned. The border crossings they enacted on behalf of the state to recover dislocated or ‘fallen’ women represent one type of choice. Yet it is an entirely sanctioned transgression, one that is inscribed by the rhetoric of the state, where these female social workers were momentarily permitted

⁴¹ Shibban Lal Saksena transcribed in the Constituent Assembly Debates of 1949. Available as an archival source at the British Library.

to enact the role of Ram in the rehabilitation of the Sitas in their care. Their remit was a simple one that struggled to play out in what was an immensely complex reality, where the women they were instructed to 'help' threatened to become the alienated 'others' in such an agenda. Many abducted women refused to leave what had now become their homes and especially their children. The Indian Congress would keep children born to Muslim women abducted by Sikh or Hindu men, claiming they were, 'children of the nation', but discourage social workers from bringing children born to Hindu women by their Muslim abductors.⁴² State 'honour' involved retaining religious 'purity', despite the façade of secularism. Nationalist politics re-inscribed itself in the wake of discontinuous violence through curtailing the transgressive potential that female sexuality represented, even as it crossed borders in such jarring ways. Homogeneity had to be reinforced, culminating in a second migration in the wake of Partition of 50,000 Muslim women returning to Pakistan, and 33,000 non-Muslim women crossing the border to India.⁴³

'Memory demands poetic licence'- Gender, the Body and Partition in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice- Candy Man*

Bapsi Sidhwa's third novel is a retrospective account of Partition. The author, as an eight year old, must have 'demanded' a certain degree of 'poetic licence' to narrate her experience (*Ice-Candy Man*, p.167). Described by Ananya Kabir as 'autobiographical', the story of the tumultuous separation of the country, as rendered through the dual perspective of an eight year old Parsi girl who is stricken with polio, and the narrator's discontinuous narrative interventions, where her voice

⁴² Urvashi Bhutalia, 2000.

⁴³ Urvashi Bhutalia, p.189.

transmogrifies into her adult self, bears an uncanny resemblance to the *Bildungsroman* of the author's own life.⁴⁴ Born in 1939, Sidhwa too, suffered from polio and as an only child, moved from Karachi to Lahore before Partition occurred. Neither Muslim, Hindu or Sikh, 'she belongs to the minority Zoroastrian community', a 'historically diasporic' group who migrated to India one thousand two hundred years ago from Iran, due to religious persecution.⁴⁵ As such, she, like her narrator, fell outside any of the pre-defined religious denominations that shaped the partition of her country, making her a detached observer to the violence and chaos erupting around her. Her family were not compelled to undergo the traumatic and destructive border-crossings that defined the period, giving her a somewhat unique but also immensely privileged position in its retelling:

[...] wave upon wave of scruffy Muslim refugees flood Lahore- and the Punjab West of Lahore. Within three months seven million Muslim and five million Hindus and Sikhs are uprooted in the largest and most terrible exchange of population known to history. The Punjab has been divided by the icy card sharks dealing out the land village by village, city by city, wheeling and dealing and doling out favours. (*Ice-Candy Man*, p.167)

Relaying these events is the narrative voice of Lenny, the aforementioned eight year old affected by polio. In this quotation, her childlike observations are disruptively welded onto what may either be her own adult voice, politically charged authorial comment, or an amalgam of the two. For the narrator, the 'waves of scruffy' Muslim refugees that pour across the Punjab border from what is now a separate India symbolise the disintegration of her own social and cultural existence. This is shaped

⁴⁴ Anyana Kabir, 'Gender, Memory, Trauma Women's Novels on the Partition of India', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 25.1 (2005), 177-190 (p.182).

⁴⁵ Ambreen Hai, 'Border Work, Border Trouble: Postcolonial Feminism and the Ayah in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46.2 (2000), 379-426 (p.387). *Cracking India* was the alternative name under which *Ice-Candy Man* was published in Europe and the USA.

by a group of friends drawn from all of Lahore's diverse religious populations, who she vicariously establishes relationships with through the novel's most significant protagonist, her Ayah, a servant nanny responsible exclusively for her. The narrative, in many ways, vocalises the gendered silences of Partition through the story of Ayah, who, amidst the outbreak of communal violence in Lahore, is abducted, raped, forcibly converted and then married to the eponymous Ice-Candy Man. He was once the life and soul of Lenny and Ayah's polyglot group, but becomes the focus of a radicalised sensibility through an all too familiar experience:

We stir and stretch, preparing to break up for the evening. And just then, in the muted rustle, we hear the rattle of a bicycle, hurtling up our drive at an alarming speed. We grow still, expectant. And emerging from the night like a blundering and scraggy bird, scraping his shoe on the veranda step to check the heedless velocity of his approach, Ice-Candy Man comes to an abrupt and jolted halt. He is breathless, reeking of sweat and dust, and his frantic eyes rake the group. They rest for an instant on the Sikh, and flutter back to us. 'A train from Gurdaspur has just come in', he announces, panting. 'Everyone in it is dead. Butchered. They are all Muslim. *There are no young women among the dead! Only two gunny sacks full of women's breasts!*' (*Ice-Candy Man*, p.167, emphasis mine)

Sidhwa's 'blundering and scraggy bird' had travelled to the station to await the arrival of his sister and other relatives from neighbouring city Amritsar, a majority Hindu district. As is also borne out in the grim pages of a forgotten history however, the refugee train was ambushed and communal revenge literally carved itself out on the bodies of the women occupying its carriages. Ice-Candy Man's 'extremist' turn alienates his friends, and the group, with Ayah at its centre, begins to break up. But his fury is expressed less through heading mobs which chase hapless Sikhs out of their burning homes and enforce circumcisions and conversion on Hindu men, and more across the bodies of those 'other' women. Ayah is totemic in this sense, her body being the site of multiple narrative inscriptions including abduction, rape, forced conversion and marriage, and then recovery. Ice-Candy Man exploits narrator

Lenny's 'truth infected tongue', coaxing her to reveal Ayah's position amidst frantic attempts by the Muslim cook Imam Din and other members of the Warris Road, Parsi household to conceal her (*Ice-Candy Man*, p.194). She is taken away and only rumours of sporadic sightings circulate until she is located by Lenny's mother and Godmother, who have jointly established a rehabilitation centre and refuge for abducted, 'fallen' women. It emerges that after a series of rapes, Ayah was sold by Ice-Candy Man into prostitution as a dancing girl in Lahore's red light district, The *Hira Mandi* (literally translates as 'The Jewellery Quarter'), where many of Lahore's Muslim men, who had previously claimed ignorance of her whereabouts, 'pay' her to 'dance and sing and do things with her body' (*Ice-Candy Man*, p.252). Apparently overcome with guilt, Sidhwa's anti-hero turns from pimp to pseudo romantic as he makes Ayah his wife and she is converted from the Hindu Shanta to the Muslim Mumtaz, a name with royal resonance as it belonged to a Mogul queen. Given the 'choice' of remaining with her now contrite 'husband' or returning home to Amritsar, facilitated by her Parsi rescuers, she opts for the latter, with a desperate Ice-Candy Man following her across the border. Ayah's body becomes the site of a figurative border crossing, a repository for a failed patriarchy desperately seeking redemption, and a 'recovery' that locates rehabilitation in a return to the family fold.

According to Ambreen Hai, Sidhwa's text, like the epistemological status of its author, 'situates itself on various borders (generic, discursive, ethnic, political), while it also examines and celebrates- often by enactment- the inhabitation of such borders'.⁴⁶ This is an accurate assessment of the way the novel makes a gendered, bodily intervention into 'Indian masculinist master narratives' of Partition.⁴⁷ The text rests uneasily between the playful 'poetic licence' it invests in recalling such an event

⁴⁶ Hai, p.388.

⁴⁷ Hai, p.389

and the way such poetics hold up when they are confronted with what is really at stake, the ‘truth infected’ narrative that is mapped out on Ayah’s body. To this end, Hai locates the novel’s feminism in the postmodern politics of ‘borderhood’, where rather than simply identifying ‘marginality’ which ‘rests upon a binary opposition between a presupposed strong centre and weak margin, the latter suggests a third or non-aligned space between and unsettling to binarisms’. ⁴⁸ This ‘third space’ is a performative one which involves destabilising ideologically constructed difference from within the confines of its own material referentiality. Subversion is representational, and the ‘third space’ of the border eschews any essentialism the margin lays claim to by playing itself out across the binaries of ‘margin’ and ‘centre’ at the same time, flagging up how dependent one is, for its ideologically constituted existence, on the ‘other’, making identity and reality as such, entirely contingent. In the first half of the novel, before her abduction, these material, flexible politics are ventriloquised through Ayah, where her body becomes the narrative and representational canvas for a Lahore in which religious and cultural difference is absorbed into the space of performance:

The covetous glances Ayah draws educate me. Up and down, they look at her. Stub-handed twisted beggars and dusty old beggars on crutches drop their poses and stare at her with hard, alert eyes. Holy men, masked in piety, shove aside their pretences to ogle her with lust. Hawkers, cart drivers, cooks, coolies and cyclists turn their heads as she passes, pushing my pram with the unconcern of the Hindu goddess she worships. (*Ice-Candy Man*, p.3)

The sexual politics informing the desire for Ayah’s body across religious difference therefore, undermines the essentialism with which the religious ideology reifies itself. Ayah’s body is the site at which such difference breaks down, as the ‘covetous’

⁴⁸ Hai, p.382.

glances she draws are not exclusive to the 'Hindu goddess she worships', but pervade all caste, class and culturally constructed boundaries. If identity can be so easily dislodged from its essentialist posturing through the simple play of desire, the wider ideological threads holding it in place threaten to unravel. Politics, it appears, cannot transcend their own materiality, so that Sidhwa's pre-Partition Lahore is littered with spaces and symbols whose meanings have been emptied out and appropriated. This re-enactment is corporeal, with Ayah being the main player once again. Her group of male admirers, including Ice-Candy Man, gather around her in a park where 'Queen Victoria, cast in gunmetal, is majestic, massive, overpowering, ugly' and what was once iconic of colonial ideology is now reclaimed, susceptible to a mimesis that has traversed the hallowed boundaries of difference (*Ice-Candy Man*, p.19). It is a reverse colonisation of sorts, but one that has been affected from within the structures and confines of ideology rather than outside. This performative politics is enabling for Ayah as she commands, and then manipulates the sexually charged gazes of everyone from a Hindu Masseur, to a Sikh Zoo Keeper to a Pathan Knife sharpener. No space, it seems, is out of bounds for her, and Lahore, pre-Partition, becomes a city where boundaries are purely contingent and divested of their ideological meaning. Difference is relevant only at the representational level, where its constructed nature is all too apparent in a hybridity embodied by Ayah.

Perhaps Sidhwa's own experience as part of a minority religious group in a conflict determined by hegemonic belief systems had an influence on the way the loose, hybridised way to feminist agency in her novel is plotted. The Parsis as a community had to adopt such an ethos as means of survival, and their own position in a state divided across religious lines is a source of concern in the text. In the meeting Lenny's surgeon, Col. Bharucha, calls to discuss the implications of the civil unrest,

the Parsis simply maintain the status quo, which is to succeed through expediently supporting whatever side is in power, appropriating their culture and ‘sweetening the lives of’ its ‘subjects’ (*Ice-Candy Man*, p.41). The liberating potential of such a conscious self-fashioning is that it leaves this group relatively free to practice their own religious and cultural beliefs. A Parsi, it appears, exists in that third space where the binaries that sustain Muslim or Hindu-inspired nationalist ideologies are always tenuous and compromised by the community’s own invariably alien presence. In a Bhabhian sense (who, coincidentally, is a Parsi), they at once resemble the centre but also occupy the margin, a fissured position which threatens to destabilise that binary altogether. Lenny as the Parsi narrator and a young girl, signifies how her ‘people’ have survived at the limits of representation, in a feminist sense. She is ‘theatrically inclined’ and learns how to employ her own, in many ways partitioned, body to her advantage (*Ice Candy Man*, p.150). Her polio has resulted in her right leg being disabled, ironically enabling her to craft a vicarious existence through Ayah. She is taken to the same spaces, is a conduit for the various ways Ayah’s body is sexualised, and develops sexual awareness herself through witnessing her nanny’s romantic exploits with the men of her circle. The Parsi politics of survival are superimposed onto Ayah, through whom an alternative, gendered Pakistani/Indian historiography is narrated. In an interview with Feroza Jussawalla, the author claims that she is ‘on the borderline of a few cultures and that gives her a certain objectivity’.⁴⁹ In the case of *Ice- Candy Man*, ‘borderline objectivity’ is rooted in constantly contesting and thereby rewriting the representational *subject* in historical, literary and nationalist accounts of Partition. As a Parsi, ‘at once representing a minority *and* the national aggregate’, Sidhwa appears to have effectively employed her familiarity with the

⁴⁹ *Interviews with the Writers of the Postcolonial World*, ed. by Feroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dasenbroke (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1992), p.214.

‘third-space’ to imagine a route to gendered agency in an environment where such expressions are risky and often violently curtailed.⁵⁰

‘Is there anything to compare with such cosy bliss?’- Feminism and the Body at the Intersection of Nationalism

As Sidhwa’s novel progresses, reconciling the violent implications Partition had for women of the Indian sub-continent, with a form of agency telegraphed through the body, becomes increasingly problematic. Deepika Bahri explains these schisms as ‘the novel obliging us to confront both the possibilities and the limits of literary representation’.⁵¹ Certainly, the text is consciously aware of the productive potential of the gendered body. And yet whether the ‘limits’ of such a performance are themselves consciously inscribed, or emerge as a destabilising silence around the same sign through which agency was imagined, is a question for debate. To return to the opening of the thesis, Sidhwa’s novel *The Pakistani Bride* provides the exact same dilemma, with the central protagonist’s absent presence in patriarchal and feminist discourses proving a disruptive force that the text cannot contain. The result for Zaitoon, the Bride, is an equally disturbing erasure. Hers is a gendered narrative whose presence has to be acknowledged but is somehow inimical to the text’s own strained ideological work. In the case of *Ice-Candy Man*, if Ayah is the repository of a repressed gendered history and feminist agency, her performative subversion is effaced in the Partition violence that ensues, and her body, once the site upon which

⁵⁰ Hai, p.387.

⁵¹ Deepika Bahri, ‘Telling Tales: Women and the Trauma of Partition in Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*’, *Interventions*, 1.2 (1999), 217-234 (p.217).

agency was (re)fashioned, is inscribed only with silence as her narrative and history is again only accessible through absence.

The starting point is the ambivalent relationship Sidhwa's gendered intervention has with nationalist politics, and those communally, religiously inflected nationalisms so germane to the historical moment her novel is rooted in. Hai elucidates this ambiguity well:

Sidhwa faces the tricky position of having at once to justify speaking for-and-to- the nation, and to build a critique of the Muslim nationalism that includes non-Muslims as citizens but in fact grants them only second-class status.⁵²

The problem is that the text does not repudiate nationalist politics altogether, but only critiques those manifestations of it that play themselves out along communal and religious lines. Indeed, Sidhwa skilfully parodies the triumvirate of Jinnah, Nehru and Gandhi, rendering all three with a politics of suspicion that strips them of any essentialist, mythical relevance they may have to 'history'. Like her Queen Victoria in the park, these political actors are reduced to nothing more than the sum of what they represent, and this representational space can be re-imagined and re-inscribed. The paradox, however, concerns a similar refashioning which represents pre-Partition Lahore and by extension India, as a unified, 'cosy' utopia. The syncretic landscape of the text is one where difference is respected because it is apparently not taken too seriously. Its essentialism cannot be sustained in an environment where contingencies are always consciously played out and mediated. Sherbat Khan, the Pathan knife sharpener, is no more or less important in the grand scheme of Ayah and Lenny's social circle in the Queen's Garden, than Sher Singh, the Sikh zookeeper. On an expedition to the Muslim cook Imam Din's village, where the political unrest

⁵² Hai, p.389

regarding Partition is discussed, a ‘Sikh *granthi*’ [elder] confidently exclaims ‘our villages come from the same racial stock. Muslim or Sikh, we are basically Jats. We are brothers. How can we fight each other?’ (*Ice-Candy Man*, p.59). And herein lies the contradiction, where under close scrutiny, this syncretic nationalist politics is ideological in itself, held together by discrete essentialist discourses of race and caste (a ‘Jat’ is a prominent Punjabi caste). Partition violence, therefore, risks becoming a mere historical footnote, an anomalous aberration that was a gross perversion of the harmonious, utopian values the ‘real’ India represented.

The romance of such a myopic representation is not only undermined by revisionist histories of the period but also the narrative schisms of the text itself. And these inevitably concern the position of the body in both syncretic nationalist politics and its communal ‘other’:

Things love to crawl beneath Ayah’s sari. Ladybirds. Glow-worms, Ice-Candy Man’s toes. [...] I learn to detect the subtle exchange of signals and some of the complex rites by which Ayah’s admirers co-exist. (*Ice-Candy Man*, p.20)

The female body is the complex site through which patriarchies communicate and peacefully ‘co-exist’ in pre-Partition Lahore. When violence erupts, this same body becomes the conduit for these patriarchies to compete with each other and make territorial claims. In both cases, Ayah’s body is assigned and invested with a symbolic value which resonates in the various ideological discourses that shape competing nationalisms. Whether it is in a utopian pre-Partition India or a dystopian post-Partition reality, Ayah telegraphs a gendered history that can only be read through silence. Her body, in this sense, strains at the text’s own representational limits, at once being a site of regenerative agency, and the absent presence in the attempt to

fashion that very agency. Ayah's rape and subsequent 'recovery' are instructive. For many feminist theorists, destructive violence offers the possibility of 'a determined self-fashioning, indicating the birth and development of feminist individualism in circumstances of necessity and survival'.⁵³ Such a brutal act in Sidhwa's text, however, only serves to curtail such 'possibilities' and emphasise the wider issues that circumscribe choice and agency. Ayah is hence denied access to 'feminist individualism' in the same way as she is produced as the corporeal silence in syncretic and communal nationalism. Inscribing agency and 'feminist individualism' through the body is fraught with difficulty and in Sidhwa's case, collapses under these strains. Partition violence being played out across the female body did not simply occur in a vacuum. Nationalist politics delineated across communal lines saw it being expressed and figured differently in the patriarchal economy. From being an object of desire, to one of territorial possession, the 'recovery' of Ayah from Ice-Candy man perpetuates her erasure from the limits of the text. The historical role of the state is taken up by Lenny's mother and Godmother (who is her grandmother) as mentioned, but their rescue and subsequent return of Ayah to her family in India only serves to illuminate how she is, and always has been, on the epistemological margins of their misplaced feminism. As Hai has suggested, Ayah's body figures as a fetish object, at first in the sexual coming of age of Lenny the narrator, and then in the way that a marginalised community can stake a tenuous claim as philanthropists in a changing national landscape. The contemporaneity between middle-class Parsi women and their brutalised, servant woman is dubious at best, as is the eschewal of violent dislocation

⁵³ Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.73. I would like to re-iterate again that *I am not* in agreement with the postmodern, feminist position that the critic has adopted here. Whilst the violence of rape is not eschewed, it risks being effaced by the reading of rape as a regenerative space. Such a political position however performs the equally ideological manoeuvre of forgetting and Ayah's body is a jarring reminder of what is at stake in the play of cultural memory and indeed refashioning of rape.

and displacement emphasised by a theory which figures such trauma as a necessary precondition for an expression of feminist agency. In the end, this text, as in the case of its sister one, *The Pakistani Bride*, does not so much consciously present the ‘possibilities and limits of literary representation’ as struggle to reconcile the idea of the possibilities of feminist agency with the reality of the gendered history of Partition, a history of bodily silence rather than one in which agency is achieved within or outside its own ideological limits.

‘Exile is such a hard thing’- Exile, Exchange and Women in the Literary National Consciousness

Having addressed the complexities that pervade Sidhwa’s retrospective attempt to imagine agency through an idealised, syncretic nationalist politics, it is intriguing to shift critical focus now. This involves turning to a gendered intervention in Partition literature that was chronologically much closer to the event, written in the 1950s, the immediate aftermath of Partition. Extensive research into the literary, historical and social discourse around the period uncovered just four lines about Jamila Hashmi, Subrita Kumar describing her short story ‘Exile’ as a narrative where ‘the acute alienation of a woman married to the man who abducted her is projected as the story of Sita whose exile is never going to end’.⁵⁴ In her indigenous country, despite being a prize winning writer, critical engagements with her work remain equally elusive.

Hashmi was born in 1929 in Eastern Punjab. In her late teens, when the discord and unrest broke out in her region, an area that figured the communal divide most powerfully and was the site of some of the most horrific Partition violence, she and

⁵⁴ Subrita Paul Kumar, *Narrating Partition: Texts, Interpretations, Ideas* (New Delhi: Indialog Publications PVT Ltd., 2004), p.40

her family were part of the seven million Muslims that were compelled to embark on a forced migration (*Kahani*, p.168). As such, she more than likely bore direct witness to the trauma inflicted on the terrified masses, but especially the women concerned who carry the bloodiest scars of the event, and the open wound of its memory. The majority of her oeuvre is unsurprisingly, therefore, focused on engaging with the effects of such a trauma from a gendered perspective and, in particular, mediating the way such an epistemology figures in the wider nationalist processes so instrumental in the creation of what became her country. Hashmi continued to write extensively, with her work mainly being published as serials in popular Urdu magazines for women, until her death in 1988 (*Kahani*, p.168).

The story chosen here is the aforementioned 'Exile', published in the *Kahani* anthology. The title, as has already been briefly explained, relates to the experience of an unnamed Sita, one of many women abducted from her village, raped and then married by her captor, who in this instance is a Hindu man, Gurpal. It begins in *medias res*, with the female protagonist, known only as Bahu (daughter-in-law), already having had three children when Gurpal's household is thrown into crisis over news that 'the two countries had reached an agreement' ('Exile', p.116). This is an obvious reference to the Inter-Dominion Treaty concerning the 'recovery' of women such as Hashmi's Bahu. Afraid of rejection however, and the thought of having to leave her children behind under the terms of Treaty, where children born to Indian fathers would remain with them, Sita decides to stay with Gurpal, as many women in her position ultimately did unless they were forcibly recovered. The narrative has to be read in the context of exile, and the dislocating effect this has on the female psyche as it is played out against a backdrop of competing nationalist ideologies. This is, of

course, a very different kind of exile from that which circulates as a trope in South Asian diasporic literature:

Midnight has many children; the offsprings of Independence were not all human. Violence, corruption, poverty, generals, chaos, greed and pepperpots.... I had to go into *exile* to learn that the children of midnight were more varied than I had ever dreamed.⁵⁵ (emphasis mine)

Salman Rushdie negotiates the aftermath of Partition by escaping into a self-imposed 'exile' here, in which myth and ideology cannot transcend the absurd. The author's exilic state is essentially an enabling one, where 'chaos' can be re-inscribed, and reality reconfigured so that 'pepperpots' occupy the same representational space as 'generals'. Hashmi's Bahu, however, derives no such pleasure from an 'exile' that only serves to perpetuate her erasure in the changing national and cultural landscape. Displacement does not serve as a form of regeneration therefore, but the point at which epistemic violence enacts itself at a corporeal and psychological level. The traumatic rape Bahu suffers and the way her life develops in its aftermath thus highlights the gendered exigencies her body and being were circumscribed by, before and after her trauma:

Bhai [older brother] crossed the ocean and my dreams of paradise were shattered. All the pieces of my life have spread here and there, and like glass fragments, their jagged edges wound those who pass. Everyone's feet are wounded, there's no one left to cross over to the other side. ('Exile', p.111)

Far from providing the possibility of accessing 'feminist individualism', Bhao's rape and dislocation has demystified her existence in such a way that silence is all she has left, whether it is with Gurpal and her children or on the 'other side', with her long

⁵⁵ Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (New York: Penguin, 1991), p.333.

lost brother and family. Her body is the site of inscription and exchange by and between multiple patriarchies, a direct association being made between her abduction 'and the mistake' of 'old values' her father 'trusted' ('Exile', p.114). These 'values' remain enigmatic but could be referring to historically recorded incidents of Muslim families 'giving' their daughters to sympathetic Hindu and Sikh neighbours, who offered to protect the women/girls as their own. This was an infinitely more palatable course of action than 'honourable' suicide or abduction by the mob. Yet often these altruistic families would be forced to give up what they were concealing, or the women would be abducted anyway, which is what appears to unfold in the narrative. The fate of Bahu and others like her is sealed across the lines of mutually cooperative or antagonistic patriarchies. These competing ideological structures communicated with each other through brutalising the body which symbolised their 'honour'. And the discourse of 'honour' is once again evoked when these previously opposed frameworks form ties with each other, across the bodies of women in their communities. In both cases, exile is produced as the existential condition of gendered exchange within the patriarchal, cultural economy. When the state intervenes, therefore, for Bahu, to stake its claim where locally based patriarchy failed, occupation of her body and gendered epistemology becomes a national concern, rather than the battleground on which nationalist politics were contested on a communal level. 'Exile', then, becomes the logical precondition for all the 'options' available to Hashmi's character. So that when she laments 'Why do we all think ourselves the centre of the universe?' it is rooted in the realisation that 'home', whether it is with Gurpal or her family, is a space which may stake its claim on her but one in which she has no stake ('Exile', p.115).

Representation is employed to perpetuate such a schism in a different way to Sidhwa's retrospective account. Hashmi seems consciously aware of how the Sita myth was the rhetorical cornerstone for the Inter-Dominion Treaty. Her deconstruction of such a representational discourse skilfully exposes the silence that gathers around Sita as traced through the narrative of Bahu and the scores of women like her:

The flames will rise for a long time and the faces of the people round about will look fearsome in the firelight, as if each one is a disguised Ravana seeking Sita to gloat over her isolation and her second exile. ('Exile', p.105).

These discourses are not suspended into the realms of the material but interrogated for their politically rooted contingencies. The luxury of mythologising and then playfully demythologising, as Sidhwa does in her parody of Jinnah and his contemporaries, is one that belonged to the politician who evoked the Sita myth to justify 'recovery', as mentioned earlier. It belongs to writers and feminists theorising the body of the third-world woman who experienced the horror of Partition, but it did not belong to that woman herself. Such a theory threatens to lose sight of the absence that was its *raison d'être* in the first place. Whether or not Hashmi's text was written with Partition still a recent trauma may be a moot point, but there is little doubt that these short stories, including 'Parbati', seem to be more acutely aware of contingency, in terms of agency and absence, gender and nationalism. Sidhwa's syncretic utopia, for writers such as Hashmi, did not exist in so far as it could not efface the patriarchal preconditions of its existence, which became so violently conspicuous during Partition. Refashioning that utopia out of the 'fragments' of such a violence is fraught with difficulty, as is escaping into the materiality of ideology to undermine its essentialist claims. Such an

escape resonates with the possibility of very real violence. 'Exile' is not a seamless reflection of historical events but it does inscribe their stresses, tensions and pressures in terms of the play of gender and nationalist politics during Partition. Fashioning a recourse to a syncretic, all inclusive India mirrors the u-turn in the rhetoric of both countries, when they eschewed their communal politics to open up borders that were still being forged. Between the cultural and the national, the communal and the secular, lies the fissured narrative of the Pakistani/Indian woman, perpetually in exile, perpetually under erasure.

The historical interlude detailing the narrative of Partition above charts an uneasy path back to the formative concerns of this project. Nationalist ideologies and religious and cultural differences violently communicated with each other across the bodies of women. The testimony of those such as my Grandmother, the absent presence of her dead cousin and many other oral accounts recorded by Bhutalia in particular leave no doubt as to what was really at stake when nationalist myth played itself out materially, over and across those contested border and boundaries announced by Cyril Radcliffe. The embodied violence suffered by women on all sides of the religious divide can be read as indeed being 'effectively constituted through multiple patriarchies'.⁵⁶ The operation of the state and its antecedent spaces of the community and family became crucial in shaping and defining the limits of the agency available to women and the representational form this took. As far as the politics of performance is concerned then, it is the state that can expediently engage one ideological paradigm after another whilst the women who this performance is occurring at the expense of remain at the margins of its contingent foundations. And this is what has to be considered in any literary or historical attempt to recuperate

⁵⁶ Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, 2000, p.126.

these women, or to fashion an agency whose representational logic may have been inscribed by the very forces that initially silenced such an expression.

CHAPTER 3

ROMANCING THE NATION

‘Which old life Sister?’ Zarri Bano asked in a low voice. ‘The one five years ago?’ ‘No. The one before your marriage. It has already become old. You cannot cling to it forever. You cannot be the same woman, my sister, because there is now another person in your life. Your life has thus taken on a new shape and perspective. Oh it could be so fulfilling. Don’t struggle with yourself, Sister. You will always be a Holy Woman like me, but give yourself a chance to be a normal woman too. Let yourself go!’ (*The Holy Woman*, p.520)

It seems highly probable that in repetitively reading and writing romances, these women are participating in a collectively elaborated female fantasy that unfailingly ends at the precise moment when the heroine is gathered into the arms of the hero who declares his intention to protect her forever because of his desperate love and need for her.¹

If the ‘state’ as an ‘idea’ is deconstructed and understood primarily as a claim to legitimacy then the construction, invocation and deployment of a normative ‘national culture’ can be understood more clearly as a means to secure that legitimacy. Since both ‘nationalism’ and culture are deeply gendered discourses, the field of national culture is a particularly treacherous one for women.²

¹ Janice A. Radaway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Culture* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p.97.

² Sadia Toor, ‘Moral Regulation in a Postcolonial Nation-State: Gender and the Politics of Islamization in Pakistan’, *Interventions*, 9.2 (2007), 255-275 (p.256).

‘So what if my *dupatta* fell down for a few seconds?’- The Romantic Imaginary in Pakistan

The quotation at the beginning of this Chapter has been taken from Qaisra Shahraz’s 2001 novel *The Holy Woman* and this text will form the basis for an engagement with the romance genre in the writing of Pakistani women. The development of mass media in the nascent Pakistani nation over the thirty to forty years post-Partition period is characterised by the emergence of one particular generic form that continues to be, by far, the most popular. The romance narrative, whether in its classic or family guise, dominates the airwaves of Pakistani television in elephantine dramas and is, more significantly, voraciously consumed when it appears in its most ubiquitous literary form, serialised in newspapers and magazines targeted at women.³ Yet Shahraz had her novel published in fifteen different countries before a printing house agreed to distribute it in Pakistan, the country of its author’s birth.⁴ Language was patently not the issue in this and no doubt many other instances. Shahraz writes in English but many of the writers foregrounded earlier in this thesis such as Khadija Mastoor, wrote in Urdu, the national language, and were confronted with the same obstacles to having their work published. *The Holy Woman* retrospectively re-imagines the period against which the burgeoning popularity of the romance will be contextualised. This covers the infamous reign of General Zia- with the implications his political approach and policies had on feminist intervention and

³ For a particularly enlightening study of the way popular culture is consumed and received in Pakistan see *Studies in Pakistani Popular Culture*, ed. by William L. Hanaway and Wilma Heston (Karachi: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2006). This excellent book includes a detailed discussion of how the Pakistani Drama, an influential romance form, can be located in Pakistani society, from an anthropological perspective.

⁴ Ahmede Hussain, *In Conversation with Qaisra Shahraz*, <<http://ahmedehussain.blogspot.com/2007/04/in-conversation-with-qaisra-shahraz.html>>. 3 April 2007. (Accessed 2 March 2010).

gendered agency- and also the historical election of Benazir Bhutto, which saw Pakistan becoming the first 'Islamic Country' to elect a woman leader. The copious, pseudo-novels which were serialised during the especially significant Zia period were published in Urdu and, given Pakistan's fragile archival resources, are notoriously difficult to obtain. Shahraz refashions the genre with sufficient nostalgia, referentiality and melodrama to shine a light on the way the relationship between 'national culture', feminism and romance literature can be read against the wider backdrop of Pakistan's fractious history.

It may appear peculiar to employ the generic discourse of romance literature as a repository into feminist debates on nationalism and the effect of nationalist ideologies on gendered expressions of sexuality, class and most significantly, agency. Romance narratives do seem to have something of an image problem in this sense. As Janice Radaway explains, 'Elaborate female fantasies' notwithstanding, readers are 'in effect, instructed about the nature of patriarchy and its meanings for them as women'.⁵ Ominously, the ideologies that pervade the text's easily identifiable generic conventions 'evoke the material consequences of refusal to mould oneself in the image of femininity prescribed by the culture but also displays the remarkable benefits of conformity'.⁶ And presumably, these 'benefits' can be found in the pleasures that accrue from reading such a text and sharing in the 'female fantasy' where 'the heroine is gathered into the arms of the hero'.⁷ These pleasures, thus, paradoxically bring the female reader back into the patriarchal fold, expressing her hopes and dreams, her agency, through the very ideological framework that would curtail such aspirations. Needless to say, the kind of readership relevant to the

⁵ Radaway, p.149.

⁶ Radaway, p.149.

⁷ Radaway, p.149.

concerns of this Chapter has a very different history and epistemology to the bored, suburban white middle-class housewife of middle-America. Very little research has been conducted in the way popular romance is played out across both literary and theoretical postcolonial discourses, let alone a further consideration of postcolonial feminisms. The question is not one of cultural relativity, but how representations of feminist agency within Pakistani romance texts provide continuity with the country's past, a past nationalist in hue, whose history is tainted by the violence inflicted on scores of women. The thematic content and nature of popular romance therefore, as Radaway critically observes it, risks appearing, for want of a better word, rather frivolous in a Pakistani context. Against such a harsh landscape, even those texts that set out to conspicuously subvert nationalist histories and reinsert the subjective fabric of 'Pakistani womanhood' have the spectre of the alienated, battered, female body straining at their margins and circumscribing agency. Hence it seems logical to question exactly how the Pakistani feminist subjectivity can be located in a mode that is ostensibly hegemonic and that constructs agency only within the bounds of a dubious false consciousness.

The narrative of romance appears to pan out in the following way: strong willed and assertive woman vows she can exist without (heterosexual) love; she meets an equally stubborn man who apparently does not know how to love. He exhibits crude, even violent behaviour towards the heroine and, as they both struggle with various obstacles that include their own insecurities, the hero realises that said heroine is the one he 'loves', climaxing in her being 'gathered' into 'his' now more than welcome embrace.⁸ As far as agency is concerned, it is a case of 'now you see it, now you don't'. The text performs its own Foucauldian manoeuvre, producing ideological

⁸ David Chaney, *Fictions and Representations: Representations of Popular Experience* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979).

opposition to its patriarchal discourse in the form of a vaguely feminist heroine, and then consuming the subversion it has created in those all enveloping 'arms'. 'Love' is expressed in that familiar discourse of 'chivalry', a representational device that effaces the female epistemology once again. Agency becomes a kind of strained, lost fantasy, effaced between violence and 'protection'. There are several interesting issues to consider here. Rather than focus on whether agency is ever possible in the discourses of Pakistani romance novels, it is more fruitful to look at why the recurring tropes of the popular romance genre, that appear in Shahraz's work, are as ubiquitously successful as they have been. There must be an element in these texts, and the genre itself, that transcends the reductively ideological and may perhaps lie in the pleasures its female audiences derive from them, if not in the representations of agency they may or may not perpetuate. Then there are the obvious questions of how relevant a framework exploring 'Western' romances and their effect on a small selection of women in the mid-West is to this task. As Radaway rightly emphasises, the narrative trajectory of the type of texts the Smithton women consume is ideologically reflective of their interpellation. They accede to the politics at play but only because they recognise 'the remarkable benefits of' this 'conformity'. The perks of middle-class suburbia may not be the same as those available to the working-class, Pakistani women who read romances, or even to those from the higher classes. This thesis has hopefully brought to light how the world of the Pakistani woman is different to that of her Western counterpart in terms of the challenges she faces and the constant and often bloody struggle that characterises her position in Pakistan's nationalist history.

The immediate task here is to interrogate exactly what sort of intervention romance literature represents in this young country's fractious, gendered history. It is helpful to

briefly explore the way romance conventions have been treated in some of the texts that have appeared in Chapters previous. Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* is a classic example of a work whose compromised fabric cannot sustain a saccharine love story, even if that may have been the initial *raison d'être* of the narrative. Ice Candy Man's romantic pursuit of Ayah cannot efface his abduction and rape of her, an extension of the Partition violence that provides a harrowing backdrop for the novel. And it is ultimately this seismic event that proves the greatest obstacle to forgetting in the cultural memory of the text and the reader. Ayah's body emerges as the site of multiple inscriptions that are at once nationalist, cultural, patriarchal and romantic. In the end, the way a penitent Ice Candy Man desperately follows his 'wife' Ayah across the newly formed border actually produces a gross parody of a conventional romance. Ominously, with the knowledge that a journey across national lines historically denoted rape, the reader is once again reminded of the spectre of Partition when attempting to imagine gendered agency, either romantically or otherwise.

Yet perhaps the most interesting text, in this sense, is one of the earliest that was engaged with, Farkhanda Lodhi's 'Parbati'. This was the story of the eponymous character, whose work as a spy for the Indian government has her performing extremely dangerous border crossings, where Parbati seamlessly becomes Parveen and then Parbati again. The cost of this performativity, as explained in Chapter 1 however, is inflicted on her body, whose double edged nationalist inscriptions cannot be contained by the text, and are erased in the form of her shooting during yet another border crossing. This remarkable short story does have a curious romance plot, between Parbati, now Parveen, and the General in the Pakistani army who gives her shelter and marries her after she is found abandoned and raped. Despite this echoing the many poignant stories of forced conversions and marriages however,

Parveen/Parbati takes control of her universe by placing herself at the centre of her own, romantic, textual transformation:

She turned her entire attention to the home, laughing and chirping the whole day. This was Hassan's home. It was her home. When Hassan was on duty she would sit on the prayer mat saying all kinds of prayers. She had texts framed from the revealed scriptures and the sayings of the Prophet and hung them on all the walls of the house. ('Parbati', p.130-131)

Reality soon collapses the discursive walls of Parveen's materially fashioned existence. The General discards his pregnant wife on the border where he recovered her beaten body, and the 'shared fantasy of romance' with it ('Parbati', p.129).

Parbati/Parveen becomes symbolic of those hundreds of other women through whom the men of national cultures communicated. Her child is a challenge to communal essentialism. Its existence cannot be tolerated by either Hindu or Muslim husband, who quickly demonstrate that subversion which begins with emphasising the body's potential for performance, can end in a reminder of its fragility.

To end this section, it is interesting to explore the position of romance tropes in the work of a prominent author and poet, whose most influential pieces were produced within the very historical moment this Chapter is concerned with. The notorious period of General Zia's martial rule in Pakistan, swiftly followed after his death, by democratic elections and the appointment of the country's first woman prime minister, saw an exponential rise in the amount of popular romances being consumed and written on the Pakistani literary scene. But Fahmida Riaz was not one of these writers. Her poems, political essays and short stories provide a unique counterpoint to the popular generic discourse of her time, as well as a lens through which Pakistani romance fiction's own intervention can be read both historically and in feminist terms. The significance of the Zia period and its implications for the interplay of

gendered and nationalist political discourse will be explored in more substantial detail later on in the Chapter. But for the moment, a brief illumination of his reign is necessary as it is so crucial to Riaz's work. In *Four Walls and Black Veils*, Aamer Hussein describes the author and her literature in the following terms:

From the outset she refused to be typecast as a woman poet and conform to what are generally regarded as the confines of 'proper' literary and creative traditions of feminine poetry. In her choice of themes, diction, allusion, and similes she broke out of the inhibitions imposed on her gender.⁹

Her writings were oppositional in every sense of the word. Riaz's politically charged repudiations of 'the inhibitions imposed on her gender' were not simply to be found in the political unconscious of allegorical fictions, but were dangerously critical of state and society. She was not only a poet and a writer but an activist, and the regime of the period in which she developed such a political consciousness provided a target against which her intellectual sensibilities could be directed. Initially, Riaz was influenced by her exposure to the Marxist political scene in London during the rise of Thatcherism in the late 70s. Determined to give the alienated working classes a voice, she returned to Pakistan and began working on the newspaper 'Awaz', a prominent left-wing broadsheet, where she met her second husband Zafar Ali Ujan. They both held similar political views and became leaders of the growing number of the Pakistani intelligentsia. These middle-class intellectuals were mobilised initially by Zia's plans to hang the democratically elected Prime Minister, Zulfikhar Ali Bhutto and seize power. This was a watershed in Riaz's life. She and her husband were imprisoned for inciting civil unrest and anarchy. Riaz was bailed by an admirer of her work and then chose to go into exile to India under threat of house arrest. From the relative safety of

⁹ Fahmida Riaz, *Four Walls and Black Veils*, ed. by Aamer Hussain (London: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.6.

her adopted location, her awareness as a feminist took shape, undoubtedly as a direct result of the stories of injustice and violence against women that were reaching her from across the border.¹⁰ General Zia had engaged familiar ideological tropes in a politics that associated all that was pure, and also by association impure in the parlous Pakistani state, with the symbolic and real female body. Riaz's annexation of class and gender concerns raises some interesting complexities in her work. These are apparent in a short story she wrote in Urdu (as the majority of her writing is), but translated herself for the compilation *Kahani*. 'Some Misaddressed Letters', written whilst Riaz was in exile, narrates a similar story of displacement, where Amina, a female activist, and Murad, her male contemporary, are initially sent to India but return to a politically chaotic and unstable Pakistan.¹¹ The temporal shifts in this narrative are remarkable. Barely eight pages in, it begins in the present, lapses into memory through stream of consciousness and finishes with two flashbacks. The complexity in the story's structure reflects its own divided ideological fabric. As Amina works through her memories, she finds that as a woman representing working-class causes, she is the site of a curious double colonisation:

Amina was beginning to feel exhausted. She looked at the room, the flowers, the photograph of the Founding Father on the wall. She knew how he felt, knew that despite his affected mannerisms, he was really feeling sick at heart. But there was a difference. The root of his anguish lay in his own choice. He was not frightened like Amina. She smiled sweetly and bade him goodbye. She had just seen the face of rampant angst. (p.98)

The site of this epiphany is the 'host country' (p.99) of India, where Amina finds herself intellectually neutered, her offerings dismissed by the male intelligentsia as

¹⁰ Tariq Rahman, *A History of Pakistani Literature in English* (London: Vanguard, 1991).

¹¹ Fahmida Riaz, 'Some Misaddressed Letter', in *Kahani: Short Stories by Pakistani Women*, ed. by Amer Hussein (London: Saqi, 2005), pp.95-105. Subsequent references to the anthology are within the main body of the thesis in parenthesis and are from this edition.

‘sincere attempts’ (p.99). The author’s gender here has problematised any routes to agency she may have attempted to fashion through a working-class position. But it is what happens next in the narrative that is most interesting from the perspective of romance conventions. Amina tackles the irreconcilability she is confronted with by nostalgically conjuring up an Indian man who could have been her lover, the subject of ‘misaddressed letters’ that she had composed and sent some years ago:

For Amina, her love for this young man was like the legendry flame in the faraway place on which the washerman fixed his gaze as he stood in the freezing waters of the Yamuna through a long, cold night. (p.97).

And at this point the romance threatens to become a parody of itself, as this man emerges in a similar memory of Murad’s, as the husband of a female peasant he is about to make love to. The would-be romantic hero is far from the objective correlative here. Riaz employs romance conventions cleverly to traverse a multitude of points in Pakistani history where class and gender are far from frameworks that share common political ground. Feminist concerns and agency are produced as silence at each of these sites, the most pertinent of these being the last. The peasant woman Murad is with, was, along with the other women, used by the ‘comrades’ in his revolutionary group to deter local bandits hired by an unscrupulous landlord, from stealing the peasant harvest. The mercenary mob stops short of attacking the women from fear of reprisals that may be committed against their own and by extension, their ‘honour’. Behind the seemingly parodic use of romance convention is the echo of an ideological work that resonates across time, in the past as a bloody reminder of what transpired in Pakistan/India’s gendered history, and in the present as still very much at hand and operating to circumscribe feminist agency.

Want Your Bad Romance- Janice Radaway on How Romance Should be Read

In 1984, Janice Radaway published her theoretical observations in a groundbreaking ethnographic research project she had undertaken. Basing herself in the small but affluent city of Smithton, North Carolina, Radaway meticulously records the reading habits and practices of a group of women who are self confessed romance novel aficionados. She discusses their preferences for types of romances, genre characteristics that they like or dislike and probes the responses of the women, attempting to situate these, as well as the novels themselves, in a theoretical and ideological context. She explains that the majority of her sample was comprised of middle-class housewives who ‘made daily connections between their reading and social situations as wives and mothers’. ¹² Patriarchal culture is, therefore, a significant discursive framework for Radaway. She views the act of reading as a feminist ‘intervention’ in the male-centered ‘social situation’ of her group. ¹³ What is immensely interesting about this most influential piece of work, as far as the research of this thesis on Pakistani romance writing is concerned, is how it apparently begins with a similar, conflicting problematic:

Does the romance’s endless rediscovery of the virtues of a passive female sexuality merely stitch the reader ever more resolutely into the fabric of patriarchal culture? Or, alternatively, does the satisfaction a reader derives from the act of reading itself, an act *she chooses*, often in explicit defiance of others’ opposition, lead to a new sense of strength and independence? ¹⁴

¹² Radaway, p.9.

¹³ Radaway, p.10.

¹⁴ Radaway, p.15.

Radaway intends to locate agency in the pleasure of her readers as well as in any strains or indeterminacies she is probably unlikely to find in the type of texts that are being considered. The objective, other than the promotion of popular literature as worthy of rigorous intellectual inquiry, is clearly set out by the critic:

We might learn how to activate the critical power that even now lies buried in the romance as one of the few widely shared womanly commentaries on the contradictions and costs of patriarchy.¹⁵

Radaway painstakingly interrogates why the women read what they do and the way they do, to construct a convincing picture of the genre, and the pleasures specific aspects of its narrative hold for her readership. The differences between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ romances are delineated, and theoretical explanations offered as to why certain distinctions are made, such as the level of sexual explicitness, or the way the heroine is portrayed in terms of her relative strength to the hero.¹⁶

This is, however, where the problem lies. There is a discrepancy between Radaway’s theory and methodology. Her intentions to transcend the reductive as far as the study of romance literature is concerned are undermined by her invocation of those very same binaries and essentialisms. The most conspicuous of these is her reliance on simplistic psychoanalytical models to explicate the very complex material her research has uncovered:

On the other hand, by emphasising the intensity of the hero’s uninterrupted gaze and the tenderness of his caress at the moment he encompasses his beloved in his still always “masculine” arms, the fantasy also evokes the memory of a period in the reader’s life when she was the centre of a profoundly nurturant individual’s attention. Because this imaginative emotional regression is often denied women in ordinary existence because men

¹⁵ Radaway, p.20.

¹⁶ Radaway, pp.70-74.

have been prompted by the culture's asymmetrical household conditioning to deny their capacity for gentle nurturance, it becomes necessary to fulfil this never-ending need in other areas.¹⁷

This psychoanalytic model, offered to explain why the Smithton women prefer heroes who display tenderness and presumably effeminate vulnerability, contains a multitude of flaws. The most glaring contradiction is that it brings a possibly subversive reading pleasure back into the very essentialist framework that it was the *raison d'être* of Radaway's project to contest in the first instance. Her reasoning dictates that all women who consume these romances are really just subconsciously searching for a return to that one primordial moment when they were nurtured by their mothers. Patriarchy has denied them the desire that they now fulfil through their reading. And yet the nature of such a fantasy is dyadic itself, the mother at the heart of a nuclear family with a maternal and paternal axis, making Radaway's own logic, perilously ideological.

As far as Pakistani romance writing is concerned, *Reading the Romance* proves useful but also highly paradoxical and challenging. Of course, most conspicuously, every 'other' type of example of the genre, be this in postcolonial or epistemological terms, falls outside its remit, and therefore on the margins of its methodology and theory. Radaway's generalisations prove dubious even for the race and class of the type of woman she is researching. But her findings provide an extremely useful counterpoint against which explorations of Qaisra Shahraz's work can be juxtaposed. It is evident that the way different women consume romance literature varies greatly, and the Pakistani case throws this into sharp focus. Patriarchy in this sense cannot be monolithic, the Pakistani woman's experience of it is at great variance with that of a

¹⁷ Radaway, p.84.

white, middle-class American house wife. Then there are also issues of national culture that Pakistani examples of the genre have to be read against as a contextual backdrop. But the one aspect that is fascinating is the admittedly brilliant analysis of violence in the texts the Smithton women enjoyed:

Violence is acceptable to them only if it is described sparingly, if it is controlled carefully, or if it is *clearly* traceable to the passion or jealousy of the hero.¹⁸

Violence against the female body is, therefore, justified if it is an intrinsic part of the hero's 'passion'. His previous actions, including rape in many cases, can be forgiven as long as he redeems himself in the patriarchal sense through chivalry and love. Yet this sort of romance narrative manoeuvre, as has been highlighted, proves extremely problematic when it is inserted into the texts being discussed in this thesis. There is no conscious or unconscious logic in these stories. Violence cannot transcend its own unconscious history, it is always present, always inscribed into the latter's consciousness in the form of the female body and its politically charged place in the country's nationalist imaginary. For a Pakistani readership, Murad and Parveen's General cannot be fashioned into violent men who have learnt the error of the ways, cultural memory is unable to escape the spectre of violence so easily.

¹⁸ Radaway, p.76.

The Progress of Romance (?) - Critical Developments Since Radaway

The problematic psychoanalytical framework Janice Radaway adopted in her recuperative study of the popular and traditional romances, located its feminist logic in the specific pleasures the Smithton women derived from reading and engaging with their texts. The subsequent expression of the significance of these pleasures through a theoretical paradigm that is limited at best, compromises their potential in terms of mapping out how readers of romances find, within their responses to their novels, continuous ways of coping with and shaping their own patriarchal environments. Following on from feminist criticism on romance literature in the 1980s, it is fair to suggest that the surprisingly sparse work which emerged post Radaway tackles these very concerns. A common thread is the exploration of the seemingly paradoxical relationship between a genre that inculcates broadly patriarchal values and its sustained popularity, through a number of manifestations, with an audience that is aware of the contexts of contemporary feminism. Stevi Jackson notes thus the observations of the first academic forays into the field:

It is [...] clear from ethnographic studies like Radaway's that when women talk about their reading and viewing preferences this can be an occasion for discussing gender differences, highlighting men's distance from the feminine emotional world and voicing their criticism of the men in their lives. Rarely, however, does this lead to any explicit critique of heterosexual relationships. As Radaway herself notes, the consumption of romantic fiction is *an adaptation* to discontent not a challenge to its source. It also sustains the ideal of romance which produced the discontent in the first place.¹⁹ (Italics mine)

In an astute review of feminist critical discourse in the field of romance literature, Jackson makes a number of interesting parallels which stem from the above analysis.

¹⁹ Stevi Jackson, 'Women and Heterosexual Love: Complicity, Resistance and Change', in *Romance Revisted*, ed. by Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), pp.49-62 (p.55).

Critics who locate a subconscious feminist impulse within their readers that finds resonance in the subtly subversive, oedipal logic of the fiction they are consuming, are themselves interpellated by similar subconscious desires and motivations:

It is perfectly possible to be critical of heterosexual monogamy, dismissive of romantic fantasy and still fall passionately in love: a fact to which many feminists themselves can themselves testify.²⁰

To this end, Tania Modeleski, in *Loving with a Vengeance* (the other seminal publication from this period in the 80s where romance literature became the subject of rigorous academic inquiry), suggests that the chauvinism reinforced in the culmination of the romance narrative is ‘a cover for anxieties, desires and wishes which, if openly expressed, would challenge the psychological and social order of things’.²¹ The pleasure the heroine derives from that fleeting, perfunctory moment where the hero’s masculinity becomes feminised and he declares his unconditional love, a moment of transformation, is for Modeleski, rooted in revenge. And for the heroine it will always signify an anxiety that can be wielded by herself in moments of gendered crisis. For the rest of the time however, it is to remain firmly suspended in the subconscious play of the reader’s and the author’s imagination. As Jackson, continues to explain, ‘feminists have broken the silence’ that ‘surrounded our continued experience of “unsound” desires’, and consequently ‘come out’ as secret

²⁰ Jackson, p.56.

²¹ Tania Modeleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* (New York: Routledge), p.30. Apart from Modeleski and Radaway, other extremely useful contributions in the field include: Kathryn Weibel, *Mirror Mirror: Images of Women Reflected in Popular Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1977), Alison Light, ‘Returning to Manderley- Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class’, *Feminist Review*, 16 (1984), 7-25. This is an especially seminal paper to emerge from the new approach where Light subjects the canonical novel to a rigorous psychoanalytic reading to trace the link between gender, class and sexuality in the genre.

fans of romance.²² The framing of the act of romance reading in terms of a guerrilla psychoanalytic fantasy can be traced back to how the genre and its readers were perceived on the thriving academic landscape of feminist studies in the 1970s.

Disdain, in this instance, would be a conservative description. According to Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff:

Second wave feminist antipathy and dismissiveness towards romantic fiction extended to its readers who were regarded as passive, dependent, and addicted to trivial, escapist fantasy.²³

This was evidently a rhetorical environment that alienated those ‘other’ women, who had somehow compromised the feminist cause by embracing the dangerous pleasures the romance had to offer. The alternative represented by the likes of Modelski and Radaway challenged the reductive binary where the battle lines were established between ‘good’ (feminists who did not read romances) and ‘bad’ (women that did). The implication was that consuming such texts ultimately banished readers to their prosaic, victimised existences, where they were no longer part of the feminist fold and were marked simply as ‘ordinary’ women. The shift in critical direction, therefore, that rescued the voices marginalised by the discourse of second wave feminism, may have appeared nostalgic in its approach. Charlotte Brunsdon²⁴ views it in terms of generational conflict where ‘younger feminists were acting out troubled and ambivalent relationships with an older generation of women’.²⁵ However, it was also

²² Jackson, p.56.

²³ Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff, ‘Rewriting the Romance’, *Feminist Media Studies*, 6.4 (2006), 487-504 (p.491).

²⁴ Charlotte Brunsdon, ‘Identity in Feminist Television Criticism’, *Media, Culture and Society*, 15 (1993), 309-320 (p.315).

²⁵ Gill and Herdieckerhoff, p.491.

very politically charged in itself in repudiating the essentialism that underpinned the feminism it was opposing, where one type of ideologically motivated construction of womanhood was privileged over others. Locating other legitimate challenges to patriarchy from within the sphere of the everyday experiences and pleasures of many of the gendered epistemologies that were previously treated with contempt, undoubtedly precipitated a rethink of the relationship between women's studies and 'feminine' cultural forms like the romance novel in its popular and traditional guises.

To return to the original theoretical dilemma in the field, feminist academics did not so much have an issue with what originally motivated the critical inquiries of Radaway, Modleski and other critics and the change these studies represented. Indeed, this was an ultimately progressive response which caused a section of feminist studies at least, to ask certain strained and uncomfortable questions about itself in terms of who, exactly, the women it purported to represent were. These questions however, were not uncomfortable enough for feminist critics concerned with the genre, revisiting a seminal moment in their field. The problem, as explained, lies in the frame of reference adopted to illuminate why the audience of romance fictions reads the way it does, and the significance of this reading practice and its associated pleasures to the challenges they face in their environments and their attempts to affect a change in the latter. The response to one essentialist discourse, which alienated a plethora of women who consume romances, appeared to be fashioned out of psychoanalytic traditions that were equally totalising. What resulted was another fixed, iconic sign, delineating a type of woman that would read romance fiction to compensate for a lack in her invariably white, middle-class, house bound existence. The subversive undertones in such fiction would telegraph a utopian, heterosexual fantasy for the ideal dyadic relationship and by extension, nuclear family. Jackie

Stacey and Lynne Pearce explain how feminists concerned with developing the study of romance fiction further reconciled themselves to the obvious flaws in the psychoanalytic approach, where fixity is sought in a textual field and readership that clearly defies any such attempt:

The big difference between using structuralist and discourse theory to explain the mechanism of romantic love is whilst the former attempts to explain all romance according to a single (typical) model, the latter allows for plurality and contradiction within the construction.²⁶

It must be stressed here that this is obviously not the first time feminism and its study in general has become acquainted with the work of Foucault. 'For feminists attempting to theorise romance', however, 'the prime advantage' of his vaguely poststructuralist brand of Marxist philosophy 'is that it is conceived as historically and culturally specific (different women, in different historical periods, and in different cultures will have experienced it differently, and that it is dynamic, liable to change and transformation)'.²⁷ There has, hence, been a shift towards understanding romance texts in terms of the salient power relations that are played out in their discursive fabric. In this way, there can be a variance in context and representation, but the significant word is 'allowed', any conflict or contradiction which appears to undermine the hegemonic discourse of the text is produced and managed by that very discourse. This is subversion purely by the numbers and, underpinning it, is a misconception regarding several formative theoretical frameworks, which tends to see ideology as a separate entity from discourse. Rather than argue a theoretical point which belongs in another paper it would suffice to say that Foucault's theorising did

²⁶ Jackie Stacey and Lynne Pearce, 'Introduction', in *Romance Revisted*, ed. by Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), pp.11-45 (p.27).

²⁷ Jackson and Pearce, p.27.

not efface ideology altogether, far from it. What his work did map out however, was a radically different understanding of it, where it is not monolithic or singular in its repressive purpose, but dialectic and reinforced through consensus. Discourse is a fundamental part of this consensus and a site where conflicting and competing ideologies can be played out to ultimately reinforce that consensus, the hegemonic ideology. False consciousness is not suddenly eradicated, but achieved through ideological rather than repressive means. Theorising ideology as separate from discourse in this way is undoubtedly a legacy of romance criticism that has developed in the feminist field. Second wave feminists such as Germaine Greer and Dale Spender very much viewed readers of such texts as the victims of patriarchal ideology, a relationship that they theorised as singular and uncomplicated.²⁸ These women would read their books and then become the literary equivalent of Stepford Wives. Ideology as a discursive term, thus acquired a pejorative connotation, especially when Radaway and other critics from that period entered to rescue romance fiction and its readers from its restraining clutches. Turning to Foucault however, does not see it disappear into thin air. It is still very much alive and well, but readers of romance, rather than viewed as innocent victims of ideology, are now very much implicated in its continued existence.

Jackson and Pearce are not in any way being specious when they emphasise how Foucauldian theory has opened up diverse ways of reading and interpreting romance. It may allow for different representations of sexuality, class and race within the romance paradigm. However, these, in the end, serve only to reinforce the dominant power relation, not refashion or subvert it. It is as reductive in its own way as any

²⁸ Romance Fiction and its readers became the abjected other for many critics as feminism became prominent in academia in the 1970s. Good examples include Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (St.Albans: Paladin, 1977) and Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1979).

another monolithic theoretical discourse. And its relationship to, certainly Derridean poststructuralism, is compromised here. Its effects have been pervasive in the field. In an enlightening analysis of the contemporary 'chick-lit and flick' phenomenon, whose lineage can obviously be traced back to popular and traditional romances and their cultural forms, Rosalind Gill and Elena Heirdieckerhoff claim:

It would seem [...] that the codes of traditional romance are reinstated "through the backdoor" by what we call a "re-virginisation", and further that chick-lit, like traditional romance, offers precisely the promise of transcendent love and sexual satisfaction discussed by Modleski. One of the things that makes this important and fascinating is that it implicitly suggests that sexual liberation (here represented by the notion of pursuing more than one sexual partner) is not what women really want.²⁹

Promiscuity apart, the critics painstakingly identify various ways in which the new romances purport to differ from their predecessors, but in the end share gender politics that are remarkably similar. One of these is how career-mindedness, which explicitly denotes independence, actually, when followed through in the fabric of the narrative, implicitly suggests that progress in the capitalist world can only be achieved once romance with the right man is found.³⁰ The authors here have employed Foucault in a genre that appears remarkably amenable to such an analysis. In the context of the way such criticism has developed, it seems pertinent to question how subversion can be theorised in the future and whether, indeed, it is possible, either at the level of textual or reading practice.

As far as the way romance as a generic discourse figures in popular fiction such as *The Holy Woman*, one of the more interesting theoretical developments in feminist

²⁹ Gill and Herdieckerhoff, p.494.

³⁰ Gill and Herdieckerhoff, p.495.

terms is certainly the 'almost/but not quite' postmodern position. Jackson and Pearce explain once again:

[...] it is the narrativity of romance which crosses the common-sense boundaries of 'fact and fiction', 'representations and lived experience', and 'fantasy and reality'. In our relationships, as well as in our reading or viewing, romantic scenarios accord to cultural codes and conventions [...] The typical trajectories outlined extend beyond the Hollywood screen or the supermarket paperback and into the stories we tell ourselves (however much reformulated) about our past, present and future romantic relationships, or lack of them.³¹

What the authors appear to be suggesting, is that the all pervasive hegemonic discourse of romance cannot escape its own textuality, beyond all the cultural forms that mediate this, from literature in the supermarket, to Hollywood cinema.³² With this being the case, the concrete essentialism that the discursive politics of romance could reliably lay claim to, appears quite precarious. There is no clear distinction between 'representation and lived experience', instead representation becomes lived experience. Romance as discourse and cultural form is transformed into floating signifier, textually reproduced at different times and in different spaces. Feminist criticism in this field, however, has stopped short of suggesting that exposing the genre's ideology to be materially constructed, and thereby dislodging it from its essentialism, has compromised its relevance in any way. Jackson and Pearce 'invoke the metaphor of a virus', claiming that it is 'its capacity for mutation which has

³¹ Jackson and Pearce, 1995, p.15.

³² Romance criticism appeared to be revitalised during the early to mid 90s. During this time some really interesting and intelligent work was produced which approached the genre as a discourse and focused on the power relations inscribed within its novels. See especially, Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992), Lynne Pearce, 'Another Time/Another Place: The Chronotope of Romantic Love in Contemporary Feminist Fiction', in *Fatal Attractions: Rescripting Romance in Contemporary Literature and Film*, ed. by Lynne Pearce and Gina Wisker (London: Pluto Press, 1998), pp.120-145 and Chrys Ingraham, *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

enabled romance to survive'.³³ The refashioning of the genre from previously alienated perspectives of race, sexuality and class along with a conscious awareness of its political precariousness has, ironically enabled the discourse of romance to re-energise and transform itself.³⁴ A lesbian love story, or one that crosses different cultural and racial lines, will still, in the end, have the same transcendental romantic logic pervading its narrative, the same ideology, but only this time, sensitive to 'other' relativities and contexts. Whilst it is difficult to share such a cautious outlook to the postmodern moment in the genre entirely, one should be wary of a literary practice that foregrounds an embracing of textuality for textuality's sake. It must be remembered that to begin with, such a practice has to be political, where marginal configurations of female sexuality, race and class enunciate themselves from within the representational space of the hegemonic, not outside. If, however, such subversion then attempts to fashion a politics outside of what is constructed or representational, it becomes as precarious as the hegemonic romance ideology it sought to rewrite initially. And this is the delicate tension that is mediated as different epistemologies and voices look to stake their claim in a genre which has previously effaced them, without crucially losing sight of what is at stake. The line between textuality and text, pastiche and parody, nostalgia and an awareness of how nationalism interacted with gender in the political moment her historical romance is concerned with, all need to be taken into consideration in Qaisra Shahraz's epic expression of postcolonial/postmodern romance.

³³ Jackson and Pearce, 1995, p.12.

³⁴ Jackson and Pearce, 1995, p.12.

‘It was Pakistan but so different’- Memory, Representation and Imagination in the Romance of Qaisra Shahraz

Of all the authors included in this thesis thus far, the geopolitical position of Qaisra Shahraz perhaps mirrors those contemporary postcolonial voices purporting to vocalise the concerns of the country they have been in exile from, either through birth or circumstance. Yet her work does not possess a Rushdieesque postmodern expression of postcoloniality, nor does it establish continuity with the diasporic traditions of her immediate contemporaries such as Kamila Shamsie or Mohsin Hamid. Born in the city of Faisalabad, Pakistan, she arrived in Manchester with her parents when she was nine years old, having already spent a good deal of time in the country of her birth, learning its traditions and cultures, and significantly, being schooled in its mother language of Urdu during her formative years. Shahraz was ‘still struggling to master the English language at the age of 14’ some five years after her arrival, but of course succeeded and, along with a keen interest in literature, acquired a BA and an MA in English and European Literature and Scriptwriting respectively.³⁵ At present she is working on a third novel, as well as continuing to write Pakistani drama serials, which have been formative to the expression of romance conventions in her work. Her narratives read like the novelizations of the fourteen episode dramas, full of romance, intrigue and deceptions, which Pakistani audiences consume with such alacrity.

In her aforementioned two novels, however, there is no insertion of a potentially exilic sensibility, where the dislocation that is the hallmark of the (post)colonial condition is celebrated as it is in the work of more prominent Pakistani authors.

³⁵ The British Council, *Qaisra Shahraz*, <<http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth519CDA8609f652983ELtO17D8589>>. 3 January 2007. (Accessed 3 March 2010)

Neither are the powerfully symbolic narratives that expose the way global capitalism is entrenched in Pakistani politics an apparent concern for the author as they are, again, for a number of her contemporaries. Of the Pakistan in her texts she explains:

I am an outsider, peeping into this serene world of infinite beauty with its green fields and fresh air. It is a world of my imagination and where my heart is – to which I have been returning over and over again in my work. And tenaciously holding onto it! ³⁶

Romance becomes the ideal medium through which Shahraz can construct the utopian country of her memories. And yet what has to be stressed here is the writer's memory and 'the world of her imagination'. The rural idyll of Chiragpur, Sindh is not necessarily one that Shahraz has experienced or even visited, but one that she has 'been returning to over and over again *in my work*' (emphasis mine). The representational potential that her writing provides her with enables imagination and memory to be expressed materially, so that the 'real' Pakistan and the one which exists in Shahraz's novels become indistinguishable. Shahraz is well aware of what remains on the margins:

This 'other' world simply enchanted me and I drank it all in. It was Pakistan but so different. The class divisions so obvious, where the landowning families dominated the rest of the village householders. The latter were made to know their place in society and adhered to it. This is a world of inequality, male domination, patriarchal tyranny with strict control over other people's lives – of tight-knit relationships among men and women. It is a place where huge imposing marble villas dominate the rural scene, thereby dwarfing the other humbler dwellings where people offered you infinite warmth, and wonderful hospitality, often rushing out to offer you my favourite drink of lassi. ³⁷

³⁶ Lancaster University, *Moving Manchester: Qaisra Shahraz*,
 <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/writersgallery/content/Qaisra_Shahraz.htm>. 15 February 2007.
 (Accessed 5 March 2010)

³⁷ Shahraz, lanc.ac.uk, 2005.

And consequently, her romance texts find it difficult to perform the all enveloping ideological manoeuvres that are characteristic of the genre and indeed, her readers may demand. As will be explained when *The Holy Woman* is explored in more detail, the material costs of patriarchy, village culture and its laws and traditions are questioned so frequently and so often that it is difficult for these ideological frameworks to reclaim any sort of stable enunciation, as they inevitably do in the token romances Radaway's project is concerned with. Shahraz's re-imagining of history and cultural memory make everything else that these discourses signify contingent and potentially open for reinscription. This approach, however is vulnerable to critique. The style of *The Holy Woman* is so literal in its homage to Pakistan's rich tradition of romance discourse as to be almost camp. It could be argued that rather than cleverly deconstruct through refashioning the material romance landscape so as to, at least in her writing, liberate minorities, Shahraz is actually perpetuating Orientalist myths about her home country that global audiences will all too readily consume. Even if her concerns about alienated peoples were entirely noble, they risk being suspended in the text's own immersion in referentiality. The nuances in the approach the author has chosen should not be ignored. She does claim in an interview that 'At the end of the day, though, as a writer my first priority is to provide a good read, entertain and carry my readers away to another world!'.³⁸ In so doing her *own* world, imaginary or otherwise, is not forgotten but reproduced in a number of ways which, whilst they undoubtedly appear populist in form and genre, also provide a material canvas for the concerns that inevitably still permeate the nation to be worked through on.

³⁸ Corinne Fowler, *Interview with Qaisra Shahraz*, <www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/.../Interview%20-%20Qaisra%20Shahraz.doc>. June 21 2007. (Accessed 5 March 2010)

From Romanticisation to Islamization- General Zia's Consciously Gendered

Nationalist Design:

The effectiveness of Zia's discourse of legitimisation is evident in its circulation at the level of the everyday or of 'common sense'. The regime managed to change the terrain on which questions of cultural and social life- especially with regard to women- could be debated. As a nationalist ideology, the discourse of Islamization privileged the adult Muslim male as the ideal citizen of the Pakistani nation-state while disempowering women, limiting their public visibility and mobility as well as their legal rights.³⁹

The late 1970's to the cusp of the 80's has been commonly historicised as one of the darker periods in Pakistan's already bloody, recent gendered history, given the assassination of controversial politician and first woman Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto. Yet ironically, it also provides the landscape for Shahraz's romance epics, which the author retrospectively refashions with an appreciation for adding the odd, powerful detail, that her audience can ominously identify amidst the nostalgia and knowing sentimentality. In 1977 General Zia-Ul-Haq seized power from the democratically elected incumbent, Zulfikhar Ali Bhutto, in a bloodless, military coup. This would not have been a surprise for most Pakistanis, who had already witnessed such an intervention from their military, most notably during General Ayub's period of 'benign' dictatorship in the 50s, and Major Yahya's tenure which preceded a return to democracy with Bhutto. It was what followed that was somewhat disorientating and unprecedented and saw a 'change in' the 'cultural, social' as well as political terrain, as Sadia Toor articulates so well. After sanctioning the hanging of his political rival, Zia turned his attention to what was to be the bedrock of his political *modus operandi*: the reconstruction of the country's national identity. Ostensibly, the way the country's women were marginalised in such a refashioning does not appear surprising

³⁹ Toor, p.2.

and simply seems to be a continuation of a common theme in nationalist politics. Chapter 2 of this thesis charts the development of Pakistani nationalism(s) under Jinnah and the various groups influential in the country's conception. These were all expressed across common gendered tropes, Pakistan being literally the land of the 'clean', with its women being the 'Mothers of the Nation'. The resultant patriarchy subtly evoked by this was played out and enacted in that 'other' area, the domestic and cultural domain that the state positioned itself against. In Zia's period however, nationalist rhetoric becomes altogether more transparent as far as gender is concerned:

Zia attempted to secure his power through the propagation of an explicitly misogynist ideology and by proclaiming a mission to revitalise society by correcting the immorality of women.⁴⁰

Zia's state, therefore, assumed the role of 'correcting' mechanism itself and herein lies the difference between this expression of nationalism and every other that preceded it. There is more than a symbiotic relationship between state and domestic space here, the government is not just complicit with patriarchal traditions in those areas it chooses to align itself with but it *explicitly* institutionalises these. This is where Islam enters the equation. Zia required a framework through which his discourse could unquestionably be essentialised and there was none better than the *raison d'être* of Pakistan itself. The religious fabric of the country is far from monolithic however, and here a little realpolitik was required, which resulted in Zia's nationalism being rooted in the Islam of those who had been most instrumental in his rise to power. These were the landed classes and religious parties of the far right who had been promised a role in his administration. The former would relentlessly employ Islam to legitimise tribal traditions which they believed predated it. And for the latter,

⁴⁰ Toor, p.3.

the religion had always been political Islam, and the politics at stake here were those of patriarchy, with both groups seeing the ‘moral decline; of the country embodied in its, or, more disconcertingly, ‘their’ woman.⁴¹ For Zia, the cleansing process had to begin in an area which Bhutto had dangerously neglected. The binaries for the establishment of this ideology changed subtly. National identity was mediated not against the ‘morally bankrupt’ West, but the Pakistani woman.

The motif for Zia’s gender cleansing still resonates ominously amongst Pakistani women today. *Chaadar aur Char Diwari* literally translates as ‘the veil and the four walls’, and was repeated to the point of redundancy to men as well as to women across all the institutional mechanisms the military regime had seized control of. It powerfully delineates how the reformed Pakistani national identity was to manifest itself- with the woman as absent presence. There is an emphasis on erasure and enclosure. The body, first and foremost, is to be regulated, with the *Chaadar*, derived from an Islamic directive as a head covering, to be mandatory as a form of dress for all women. Discrete cultural traditions were being expressed as national culture, with the state pursuing these with all the repressive apparatus it had at its disposal. The punishments for appearing in public at least, without a veil, often carried the threat of some form of police violence. But the sword for poorer women in the areas from which Zia had appropriated his ideology was double edged. Externally there was the threat of violence by the state and internally, ideology was reinforced in the home if

⁴¹ Following on from Sadia Toor’s brilliant and perceptive analysis of the Zia regime in terms of its impact on the Pakistani woman’s body politik, I have been fortunate enough to be able to consult several similar works, which provide of the historical period relating to the military ideologue’s dictatorship. I am indebted to Ian Talbot and his *Pakistan: A Modern History* (London: Hurst and Company, 2005) for the bulk of my information, particularly his excellent Chapter on Zia’s deployment of religious nationalism. Other historical studies include Lawrence’s Ziring’s *At the Crosscurrent of History* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), Mohammad Waseem, *Politics and the State in Pakistan* (Lahore: Progressive Publishers, 1989) and Shahid Burki and Craig Baxter, *Pakistan under the Military* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991). From a feminist perspective, especially the way the body intersected with religiously motivated ideas of nationhood,, Rubina Saigol’s *Knowledge and Identity* (Lahore: ASR Publications, 1995) and *Engendering the Nation State* ed. by Sadia Toor, Neelam Hussain et al (Lahore: Simorgh Publications, 1997), are two seminal texts.

there was any slippage on the part of the latter's more powerful partner, or indeed if 'discipline' needed to be re-established. The material consequences were soon visible through their invisibility. The numbers of women leaving their homes in rural areas and impoverished villages dwindled greatly. In urban cities there was a relative decrease too but perhaps most affected was the media, which became state controlled.⁴² Here women were only to appear with the symbolic *Chaadar*, and they were effaced altogether from mediums where the representations of their bodies were considered too sexually provocative for the male gaze. Most revealing is the second half of the slogan. 'Four walls' does not leave much to the imagination as to the position of women in Zia's national polity. The fear and anxiety is rooted in what the implications would be if the women of the nation managed to escape their enclosures. The public were left in no doubt that the consequences of such a situation would represent a return to the parlous condition of the country under Bhutto, where debauched spirituality was symbolised by the sight of women who were uncovered and who frequently left the confines of their homes. It was best, it seems, if women were *not* heard and not even seen. The national space was comprised of the home and the world and women firmly belonged in the former. This was a national identity whose conscious design and existence was predicated upon men regulating the bodies of 'their' women, and the spaces they inhabited. Islam was the essentialising mechanism through which state and cultural ideologies were disseminated. Zia's reign was not only characterised by ideological state apparatuses being engaged, but the brutal deployment of repressive state apparatus as well to enforce this.

By far the most infamous measure of Zia's nationalist project in this respect was his implementation of the Hudood or Zina ordinances circa 1983, following on from a

⁴² Talbot, p.276.

rigorous campaign to infuse *Chaadar aur Char Diwari* in the ideological consciousness of the public. Sadia Toor explains the significance of these new constitutional changes:

The Zina Ordinance was a set of 'Islamic' laws delineating the bounds of legal' sexual activity. *Zina* in Arabic means 'illegitimate sex', and the ordinance covered adultery, fornication and rape, making *each a crime against the state*. There was no provision for rape within marriage and the law required the testimony of four adult male Muslims of 'good moral character' to support a charge of rape.⁴³ (emphasis mine)

This was the Zia regime's most powerful and significant intervention in the punitive domain previously viewed as the sole preserve of discrete cultural yet domestic spaces. The state, through regulation even of the behaviour of women within the *Char Diwari* or 'four walls' of the home, made its claim on the female body. Gendered violence was to become institutionalised, a state function. Needless to say, the overwhelming victims of Zia's refashioned constitution were women, especially those from poorer backgrounds.⁴⁴ 'Rape' was reconfigured in the most dangerous of semiotic turns. Sexual violation of the body in this period became one of the most effective ways for the state to punish and control what it dictated to be illegitimate expressions of female sexuality. 'Rape' in this sense is less an act of the most horrific kind of sexual subjugation and more a logical consequence of what happens when a woman leaves her 'four walls', which was considered an illegitimate sexual act in itself. Moreover, the burden of such a 'crime' then falls solely on the victim, who is not only to blame for her predicament, but, without the testimony, as Toor explains of 'four male witnesses', is deemed guilty of fornication, and punished corporeally once

⁴³ Toor, p.4.

⁴⁴ Talbot, p.270

more, with one hundred lashes and prison time being the sanctioned penalty.⁴⁵ The female body here is the site of a two-fold attack and rape, in what is an astonishing exhibition of state power, becomes a mechanism through which a homogenously male national polity is preserved. It is not so much the threat of sexual violence that extricates women from the national landscape but the fear of what they would be subjected to if such a fate were to befall them. Any possibility of justice or a fair trial is immediately circumscribed by the very apparatus that purports to provide this, with the preconditions for ‘evidence’ that are set out hamstringing the victim before the case has even reached trial. The ‘four male’ rule ensures a *fait accompli*, and not only discouraged women from reporting such a crime, but sealed their enclosure within the ‘four walls’, and ultimately their institutionally led erasure within the constructed ‘walls’ of a national identity conveniently shaped by tribally motivated, patriarchal expressions of Islam.

In her novel *An American Brat*, Bapsi Sidhwa reflects on the zeitgeist of the Zia years in typically incisive yet emotive fashion. The impact of the Hadood ordinances on the gendered landscape of the Pakistani woman is expressed through an extended metaphor:

The new mischief in their [Pakistani women] had sneaked up on them unawares and surprised them one day when they read about the Famida and Allah Baksh case. The couple, who had eloped to get married, had been accused of committing adultery, or *zina*, by the girl’s father. They were sentenced to death by stoning. On an appeal to a higher court, the charges were dismissed. Fortunately, stoning to death was declared un-Islamic because there was no mention of it in the Quran.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Talbot, p.274.

⁴⁶ Bapsi Sidhwa, *An American Brat* (Karachi: Sama Publications, 1993), p.246. Subsequent references to the novel are within the main body of the thesis in parenthesis and are from this edition.

The cases Sidhwa details here are not simply figments of her own textual imagination, but are historically accurate and unfortunately, her narrative only skims the proverbial surface. She also describes the infamous Safia Bibi trial, whose experience represents an unnerving microcosm of how rape figured in the new nationalist politics:

The blind sixteen-year old servant girl, pregnant out of wedlock as a result of rape, was charged with adultery. She was sentenced to three years rigorous imprisonment, fifteen lashes and a fine of a thousand rupees. (Sidhwa, *An American Brat*, p.247)

This particular case was one of the first to fall foul of the aforementioned four male witness dictate. The perpetrator was well known to all parties, including the victim's father, whose charge was dismissed almost as quickly as it was brought to trial. The machinations of the state here would appear beguiling if they were not so brutally effective. This was an ideological manoeuvre which, legitimated by a claim to essentialist religion, ultimately reconfigured rape and male violence in general, expressing it as a 'natural' consequence of the debauched nature of female sexuality. In fact, in the judicial setting of General Zia's Pakistan, male violence appeared to be a veritable incredulity, and the institutional and ideological machinery was set up in such a way where the concept of 'rape' as an expression of power and violence was simply airbrushed out of existence. In its place was the social and national construction of the female as the site of male desire, a desire immune to rapacious or violent impulses. Should the unthinkable occur and such a case arise, however, it was the result of the female body's capacity to err and express its sexuality in an 'immoral' way. In this form of patriarchy, the woman is responsible in every way to ensure that her body does not arouse the 'wrong' kind of response from a male, and if it does, she would be held responsible and become susceptible to the appropriate

punishment, her ‘crime’ repackaged as one of illegitimate sexual relations outside marriage. And this was the depressing reality for many women, especially from underprivileged positions. Safia Bibi could not afford to petition the Pakistani Supreme Court and even if she had been able to, there was no guarantee that her appeal would have been successful. The rape of a sixteen year old servant girl in Pakistan’s deeply feudal society by the son of her employer is, after all, very different to the elopement of two lovers from the upper classes. Zia’s refashioning of the state’s role in the private and public spaces may well have been Machiavellian, with the newly configured nationalist ideology acting as the moral regulator of bodies and minds. But his ‘mischief’ also carried a painful sting, with the threat of violence often culminating in the *deux ex machine* the new, male-centric national character of Pakistan dictated.

Women Scorned- The Zia Era as a Narrative of Resistance

It appears tempting, in light of the historical discourse concerning the period, to view the Zia era as a grim corollary of the country’s dark past, in terms of the way the question of gender has been violently negotiated by its successive nationalisms. However, from the late 70s onwards, in the lead up to the General’s coup d’etat and his subsequent changes to the constitution within the *Chaadar aur Char Diwari* framework of Islamization, Pakistan certainly experienced its most substantial and significant period of feminist intervention and activism. These contributions played an equally pertinent role in shaping what was fast becoming a gendered nationalist consciousness. The violence that characterised the Zia years and the many victims it claimed still reverberates powerfully when the past is revisited. But alongside this

legacy of pain stands a compelling narrative of resistance, which tends to be sidelined if not subsumed, by the totemic image of the Pakistani woman as historic victim ever since the country's fractious inception. The feminist side of the Pakistani nationalist equation during this period provides a vital contextual and discursive framework for understanding how romance fiction and its consumption, so prominent at the time, can figure and imagine agency. But in the meantime it seems appropriate to return to the work of that most famous exponent of feminist literary activism and a veritable scourge of Zia's, Fahmida Riaz,:

Sire! What will I do with this black chaadar?
 Why do you bless me with it?
 I am neither in mourning that I should wear it
 Declare my grief to the world
 Nor am I a Disease, that I should drown, humiliated in its darkness
 Neither a sinner nor a criminal
 that I should set its black seal
 on my forehead no matter what
 Sir, be kind enough
 Don't give me this black chaadar
 Instead cover with it the shroudless corpse in your chambers
 Listen to her heartrending shrieks
 which raise strange spectres
 that remain naked despite their chaadars
 These are the concubines!
 They are the handmaidens
 These are the honourable wives
 who wait, queue upon queue
 to pay the dues of conjugal life
 End this spectacle now
 Cover it up
 The black chaadar has become your necessity, not mine.
 [...]
 The decaying corpse is welcome to this chaadar and these four walls
 My ship will move full sail in the open wind
 I am the companion of the new Adam
 who has won my confident friendship⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Fahmida Riaz, 'Chaadar aur Char Diwari', in *Beyond Belief*, ed. and trans. by Rukhsana Ahmad (Lahore: ASR Publications, 1990), pp.52-55

The subject of Riaz's remarkably controlled and eloquent ire is evident here, with the poem aptly named *The 'Chaadar aur Char Diwari'*. The veil, she argues, can be used less to efface her presence in the here and now and more to unveil those women that have long remained 'spectres' on the margins of Pakistan's male-centred, nationalist past. It is time for those 'concubines' and 'handmaidens' to no longer be ashamed, but enunciate themselves and collapse the patina of national 'honour' their oppression has sustained. A qualified opposition can be identified in Riaz's poem. There is the narrator's own feminist resistance, rooted in activism, an overt repudiation of the directive designed to erase her from the political and cultural spaces of nationalist consciousness. And then, almost within that same manoeuvre, there is a plea that those women, who may themselves be the site of epistemic violence in such a claim for 'freedom', must not be forgotten. What emerges towards the end of the poem thus is an agency that is tempered by cultural memory, but importantly expressed through a framework that will be recognised by the majority of the women in the nation. The evocation of religion and Islam through 'Adam' is intelligent in many ways. Riaz has forged her response from within the discursive 'walls' of the very paradigm that has been used to suppress her voice. She reveals its flexibility and inscribes herself anywhere the religious discourse's materiality can be exposed, the hallowed places within the 'walls' where her presence was previously forbidden. What remains is an ideology that has been destabilised and one whose claim to essentialism, far from atavistic, threatens to become a gross parody of itself. The symbol of 'Adam', Riaz confidently asserts, can be appropriated to include what it had been used to exclude.

A re-evaluation of the impact of the Zia regime on the nationalist consciousness, as it is narrated in hegemonic accounts of the period, would instead emphasise myriad conflict and contradictions. These discontinuities are rooted in two areas which were

by no means mutually exclusive. Most significantly, there was the immensely effective and well organised feminist activism. Orchestrated on a level that had never really been experienced before in Pakistan's young history, it mirrored what had been the status quo across the border since the bloody inception of both countries in the vivisected Indian sub-continent. But alongside this, Zia's own national dictatorship was far from harmonious, and throughout his tenure his military regime walked a precarious tightrope between appearing viciously united for the self-styled national interests and being susceptible to a dangerous self-implosion at the same time. The initial seeds of discord and uncertainty were sown for a disconcertingly (for the state) united and powerful gendered response to the misogynistic nationalist agenda. As Sadia Toor explains:

Paradoxically, arguably the most brutal and intolerant period of Pakistani history saw the genesis of its most vibrant women's movement. The cornerstone of the Islamization programmes was returning women to the domestic sphere, captured by the slogan *chaadar aur char diwari* [...] yet women poured out into the public spaces like never before- in rallies, marches and protests.⁴⁸

Ostensibly religious rhetoric had not created the hegemonic consensus and plethora of interpellated female subjects the state had hoped to cultivate. Instead, the monolithic boundaries of such a discourse were being constantly challenged by writers like Riaz, who would fashion intelligent and considered repudiations from within the confines of the very Islam that the state was employing to efface her. To this end, religion became a canvas for inscription and counter inscription in an ongoing discursive conflict between the state and its women subjects, who used every avenue available to deconstruct the politically charged nature of the former's Islamically fashioned, nationalist 'reality'. Faced with such a concerted backlash, the regime would further

⁴⁸ Toor, p.3

crystallise its position on gender by institutionalising its brand of religious rhetoric. Feminist argument would often be dismissed by the courts as lacking in 'Islamic' credibility. Yet all this resulted in, as Toor describes, was a host of women becoming educated in the jurisprudence of Islam themselves, and quite legitimately invoking their religious rights to repudiate the state's claims over their bodies.⁴⁹ Protests of this sort were led by one of the two main feminist organisations to form in this period, the WAF or Women's Action Forum. Riaz was part of the group of 'upper-middle-class women' who founded this organisation, and their 'counter hegemonic' activities consisted mainly of producing powerful oppositional cultural forms such as poetry and hosting subversive theatre performances.⁵⁰ In doing so of course, they experienced the repressive, sharp end of Zia's law, with Riaz and many other women being imprisoned or imposing exile on themselves, often to India in the case of the latter. The other prominent organisation concentrated its efforts on more direct action, and was often a victim of the very violence it was protecting its members from. The APWA or All Pakistani Women's Association was initially mobilised in response the infamous Haddood Ordinances. Instrumental here was Begum Raana Liaquat Ali Khan, the widow of former Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan. In the wake of the announcement that accusations of violent, or any crime for that matter, brought to the Shariah courts by a woman would require evidence from four 'honourable' male witnesses as opposed to one for a man, the APWA arranged for a public protest. They were tear gassed and baton charged by police outside the Lahore High Court, a display of violence which lead to widespread condemnation of the state by legal voices outside the Shariah system. Undeterred however, these two groups continued with their distinct forms of protest, and in 1984, a minor but significant modification

⁴⁹ Toor, p.15.

⁵⁰ Toor, pp.3-4.

was made to the Ordinances, stipulating that the testimony of two women was equal to one man only in crimes of a financial nature, in every other case the two were to be treated equally.⁵¹ The nature of such a victory, however, could be considered rather pyrrhic when those women who have already suffered at the hands of such an institutionalised ideology are taken into the account.

But such a change, a token gesture in the grand scheme of things, was a sign of more endemic concerns in the way the state had gone about its business. By merging the public and discrete private spheres, Zia had all but legitimised the discrete legal structures and tribal practices of those rich, landowning classes on whose back he had ultimately seized power. This was not his intention however. In making such widespread changes to the constitution, these separate patriarchies and traditions were to be appropriated in a single expression of nationalist consciousness. And there was, rather predictably, widespread resistance to this. These types of legal frameworks were present independent of state for centuries, before Pakistan even came into existence. They regulated their own spaces and by and large, made their own rules. Islam was not proving the unifying voice that Zia had hoped it would be, and part of the problem, as Ian Talbot, explains, is that Islam itself was far from monolithic. There were differences in how the smallest law was interpreted across the authorities that the regime consulted.⁵² And as Zia discovered, there was an expression for Islam out there that could belong to everyone, including the women he was trying to use its edicts to erase from the national identity. Between passionate feminist intervention, disgruntled clerics who were beginning to lose patience with the delays in implementing the Islamization each one stipulated, and landed and tribal classes unwilling to relinquish their own autonomy, the Zia regime collapsed under the

⁵¹ Talbot, p.281.

⁵² Talbot, p.260.

weight of its own preconditions. On 17 August, 1988 these political tensions were brought to a head as Zia boarded a private jet with the US Ambassador to Pakistan and a General in the US Army, signifying how, given Pakistan's strategic importance in the recently triumphant Afghan proxy war, he had ironically become more popular to the 'West', than within the nationalist landscape he had tried to shape *against* the 'corrupt' values of the latter. The plane hardly made take off and exploded in what has been confirmed since as an act of sabotage. Two years and a 'democratic' election later, Pakistan appointed its first woman prime minister in Benazir Bhutto, the daughter of the man Zia had hanged to seize power.

'Without him life loomed like a void'- Romance, Agency and the Play of Imagination in Qaisra Shahraz's *The Holy Woman*

Janice Radaway's seminal scholarship on romance literature and the way the genre is consumed by its female audience clearly remains an influential text, regardless of different contexts or epistemological concerns. This is evident in Radhika Parameswaran's, compelling replication of Radaway's methodology, but in the different surroundings and domestic space of a small city in South India:

[...] the practice of reading Western romance fiction is deeply embedded within patriarchal discourses of feminine respectability that exert control over women's sexuality. Young women's fascination for the commodities of Western material culture in imported romance fiction is located in their desire to experience their identities as cosmopolitan, global consumers.⁵³

The preserve of 'control' here belongs to regulatory nationalist frameworks, and an apparently subversive reading practice thus becomes contemporaneous with an(other)

⁵³ Radhika Parameswaran, 'Reading Fictions of Romance: Gender' Sexuality and Nationalism in Postcolonial India', *Journal of Communication* (December 2002), 832-851 (p.832)

form of patriarchy. The distance between the two is traversed instantaneously by the product of globalised culture the romance novel essentially is, with Parameswaran's ethnographic subjects delving into these texts as a way to lock into the 'Matrix' of capitalism's false consciousness. Her readers are produced and managed by competing ideological spheres that find common ground in the pleasures derived from an act that, to all intents and purposes, appears oppositional. The tropes of explicit sexuality, wilful femininity in the form of a determined heroine and representations of promiscuity are all irreconcilable with the idealistic construction of womanhood in hegemonic, South Asian nationalisms, especially contemporary ones. However, as Radaway argues, these texts circumscribe the pleasures they produce by ultimately perpetuating very specific ideologies of patriarchy, expressed through a narrative centred on a heterosexual marriage and the promise of a nuclear, dyadic family unit.

These approaches to romance fiction play out very differently when a few of the main preconditions change. *The Holy Woman* undoubtedly makes references to, and is, effectively, a romance novel in many of the ways Radaway identifies. However, it is not a Mills and Boon or a Harlequin in the crucial sense that it is not a 'Western' romance. It was first published in Turkey, outside the USA or Europe and therefore, needless to say, its audience are different to the white, middle-class women Radaway researched, the only group whom she believes a reading of the ideological work of romance is relevant to. The genre Shahraz's novel so faithfully recreates was, and still is, voraciously distributed and read amongst Pakistani women across the many class and ethnic spectrums in the country, though the texts are chiefly written in Urdu. The geopolitical distance between these women and their white, middle-class, American counterparts cannot be shrunk or collapsed by any affiliations with the politics of capitalism that may or may not exist in the texts. The copies of *The Holy Woman*

being circulated in Pakistan are not imported either, so that with an altogether different readership and a unique nationalist and historical backdrop against which feminist interventions have been played out, it appears significant to question whether a more nuanced approach to reading the Pakistani romance is required.

What is immediately evident for readers of *The Holy Woman* then, is the way the representation of a gendered, feminist agency is foregrounded. It is an agency forged from within the limits of its own tenuous literary conventions, which the evocation of romance struggles to transcend. These representational limits stem from the pressures of a nationalist history whose ideological presence proves at once unsettling and enabling. Shahraz's romance, far from performing a Radaway style containment of agency, continuously stimulates its readers' interests by suggesting how the former could possibly be achieved without necessarily being subsumed by the very cultural and nationalist patriarchies it is challenging, a reality her audience would be all too familiar with. Agency exists as a dynamic question, constantly changing and always locked in conflict, rather than a static, stage managed corollary both produced and appropriated by the ideological work of successive romance fictions. Jean Radford suggests a subtle modification to such an approach which resonates with how romance is played out in Shahraz's work of Pakistani romance fiction:

Mistaking the thing on the page for the experience itself, popular romance is seen as packaged commodity relaying false consciousness to an essentially passive and foolish reader. In fact this model is an inadequate and reductive one. Readers of even the most formulaic of mass produced fantasies for women are much more active and discriminating than this and the political effects of their reading cannot be deduced from the ideology of the text.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Jean Radford, 'Introduction' in *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction*, ed. by Jean Radford (New York: Routledge, 1986), p.14.

The theorising that suggests however, that these ‘readers’ express their pleasure in the same, homogeneous way, stemming from a repressed, subliminal desire for maternal affection is equally reductive, one would assume. As Radford continues to explain, the ‘meaning’, such as it is, of a text, is ‘constituted by socially and historically situated subjects’. ⁵⁵ In the Pakistani case certainly, these two frameworks, and the way they impact on and circulate around the reader and the text, have a great bearing on how literary pleasures are expressed and how agency is textually represented.

Shahraz’s novel in this sense is a veritable patchwork quilt of different social, cultural and literary representational material. More than resonating on a textual level, to any reader familiar with the author’s work in the genre of Pakistani television drama or examples of these generally, *The Holy Woman* reads like a novelisation of such sprawling serials, epic family melodramas that are typically broadcast across six to eight months of screen time. The melodrama in Shahraz’s epic has a decidedly visual quality, with other literary devices being predicated to reams of dialogue between protagonists or healthy doses of knowingly clichéd, free indirect discourse. So far, so romance novelesque. Indeed, part of the front cover, beneath some orientalist artwork, consists of a quotation by newspaper critic Michele Roberts, enthusiastically proclaiming the novel to be ‘a dramatic story of family intrigue, religious passions and riproaring romance’. And an initial overview of the narrative apparently reinforces such an appreciation, which speaks to the stock conventions that shape the genre, as described by Radaway.

The eponymous *Holy Woman* of the title is the heroine of the piece, Zarri Bano. Blessed with beauty and education in equal measure, she is the eldest daughter and child of Habib Khan, son of Siraj Din and overlord of his landed wealth, presided

⁵⁵ Radford, p.14.

over by both men in the rural district of Sindh. It is a landscape of feudalised values, represented not only by the patriarchy of Zarri Bano's family, but the matriarchy of a female *chaudrani* (the wife of a male landowner). Kaniz inherits the title and accompanying landed wealth as a result of her husband's death and is the subject of a secondary subplot that runs alongside Zarri Bano's in the narrative framework of the romance. And this concerns the heroine's love for Sikander, a suitor for the hand of the latter woman, whom it has proved notoriously difficult to arrange a match for. Zarri Bano, to this extent is constantly reminded of her age, a precarious twenty-eight, and the impediment this will prove to be should she not be married very soon. Her mother, Shahzada, sister Ruby and brother Jafar are all adamant that it would be folly to refuse Sikander. Yet the heroine is not the only one to initially oppose the brash hero's advances. He is very much of the *nouveau riche* class of people from the urban dystopia of Karachi, with his wealth being the product of capitalist endeavour and not feudal acquisition. Sikander and his family are diametrically opposed to feudalised patriarchy and landed gentry in almost every way. And to this end, Habib, the heroine's father, develops an immediate antipathy towards the new rival for his beloved daughter's affections, determined that she will not marry him. Zarri Bano overcomes her apprehensions, as her 'life loomed like a void without' Sikandar and romance thus 'looms' large (Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, p.40). But Habib cannot reconcile himself to even the idea of such a union, and the source of his unease, beyond the obviously Freudian, becomes patently clear. The marriage of his eldest daughter to any male will compromise the riches of his estate, as under Pakistani law, the husband in the marriage partnership inherits any wealth his new bride may have. The turning point in such an impasse arrives with the tragic death of Jafar in a car crash. As long as there was a male heir present, Habib could protect the family's

estate, but with this possibility removed, the family silver would be severely compromised should Zarri Bano marry. And at this point in the narrative, the explanation for the enigmatic title of the novel is revealed. Invoking Sindhi rural tradition, Habib, despite the vehement protestations of daughter and wife, weds Zarri Bano to the Holy Quran. It is essentially a *Sponsae Christi*, with a difference, being a complete anathema to the religion it is allegedly a ritual of. Habib's daughter is to be shrouded in a black veil at all times, when she leaves her home, and in adopting the title of *The Holy Woman* in the village, she has by rights renounced the possibility of marriage. Her new role entails devotion to the religion and its rigorous study. More significantly, however, in remaining a virgin and thus unmarried, she has also protected Habib's estate as the ritual also crucially necessitates that the inheritance in its entirety be passed onto her. Needless to say, the repercussions reverberate around the lives of all parties concerned. The hero and heroine, still very much desirous of each other, find the culmination of their feelings in the form of marriage as distant as it was once tantalisingly possible. Zarri Bano remains enclosed in the straitjacket of a tradition her fiancé cannot understand, in his appeal that it has no place in Islam and should be repudiated by her. In reaction to her refusal, he marries Ruby and has a son with her, for the sole purpose of punishing her sister, whom he remains in love with. When Sikander's wife and father-in-law are effectively martyred whilst performing a religious pilgrimage, Zarri Bano is 'released' from her vows. The opening quotation in this Chapter relates to this point in the narrative, where the same forces that attempted to convince the novel's heroine of the worthiness of her new position now wish to extricate her from that very role. Amidst much reluctance and recrimination, Zarri Bano agrees to marry her former suitor and potential lover on her conditions, which make abundantly clear that the reason for her acceding to the pressure imposed

on her, is the welfare of her nephew, Haris. The nuclear family is reformed then, but is also pervaded by an unease and anxiety, as the reader is left to imagine the consummation of a romance that may never occur.

At face value, it is logical to question how Shahraz's six hundred page epic differs from the many other generic romances foregrounded in Radaway's work, texts that are circulated and consumed globally, at least by a certain class of woman. She merely appears to have adapted stock family romance conventions to a different cultural sensibility, which necessitates that her text avoids explicit depictions of female sexuality especially, whilst at the same time adhering to and reinforcing male-centred ideals of literary propriety. The same end game, as is the case in every 'other' romance, but through different means, is what seems to be the order of the day in Shahraz's Pakistani imagining of the genre. Yet even in the somewhat compressed overview given, there are stresses and strains within the narrative framework. And these are produced at the site where gendered agency is enunciated through the ideological work of a patriarchal literary discourse. Two conflicting, irreconcilable discursive frameworks are superimposed in *The Holy Women*. The expression of feminist agency is qualified by an appreciation of the violent gaps and silences characterising the relationship Pakistani women have with their country's history. But at the same time, such an enunciation from within the confines of time honoured patriarchal conventions is confidently asserted against the backdrop of the significant feminist interventions made historically at a time when state driven, religiously defined nationalism was presenting another oppressive challenge to Pakistani women. Retrospectively or otherwise, the legacy of the Zia regime reverberates around Shahraz's novel, so that agency is the product of both the glaring contingencies that continue to mark its legacy, *and* the tenuous possibilities the historical, feminist

response to it may have provided for the expression of the former. Such a dissonant refashioning of the traditional romance's narrative fabric is signposted as early as the opening exposition of the novel, with a prologue which begins where the hero and heroine meet for the first time at a village fair. He is passing through, unbeknown to Zarri Bano, to offer himself to her family as a possible suitor for her hand. The introduction of the novel's central protagonist is very telling here, not least because it is predicated to Sikander's introduction. He is the first character to enter the scene as his entourage pass through the carnival:

Dressed in an elegant black *shalwar kameez*, a matching black chiffon *dupatta* was casually draped around her shoulders and over her hair, forming a very becoming frame for her strikingly beautiful face. [...] The warm summer breeze moulded the flimsy material of her *kameeze* against her slim frame and blew the *dupatta* off her head, letting it fold in graceful folds around her shoulders. The woman made no move to put it back, ignoring the convention of covering her head in a public place amidst a group of men. (Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, p.4)

Several interesting, recurring tropes emerge in this representation of Zarri Bano during the opening vignette of the novel. Almost immediately her subjectivity, such as it is, is inextricably linked to how she appears as the object in the male eye-line. And this, in the above passage, then continues to fundamentally define any subversive or oppositional behaviour on her part. Zarri Bano's body in this section is clearly written upon by Sikander's conditioning, sexualized gaze, and forms an overriding context in which her subsequent actions are to be read. Actions such as 'ignoring the convention of covering her head' do not have any intrinsically subversive significance as far her own agency is concerned, but are instead a part of an ideologically nuanced exchange foregrounding a heterosexual, marriage centred cultural and national identity. Yet, and this is what is very important in this early meeting between hero and heroine,

Zarri Bano's body is the site of not one, homogeneous patriarchy attempting its own fragile interpellation but several, competing ones, as is evident when her brother admonishes her for not replacing her head covering:

'Dearest sister, I wish you would make sure that your scarf manages to stay in place on your head when you are outside in a public place', he nagged her gently. 'Look at your hair! Don't you ever tie it up? It is everywhere! It is not good for a woman to be seen like this. Men, especially *Badmash* [lewd, lecherous] men, give women looks when they are as beautiful as you. You look so wanton! It creates a very bad impression. Not only of you, but of us and our father. Only naughty women do that sort of thing.' He was very much conscious of the stranger's presence and roaming eyes. (Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, p.5)

Jafar's alternative patriarchy evokes an ominous period in the history of the gendered, nationalist consciousness. The 'bad impression' to which he alludes seamlessly fuses family and national honour with the regulation of the female body and by extension, sexuality. Over the course of the novel, the apparently conflicting spheres of Sikander's patriarchy, shaped by sexual desire, and Jafar's punitive, male-centred domestic space where the policing of the female body masquerades as chivalry, intertwine seamlessly. The formative intervention to how later events unfold and the re-imagining of Zarri Bano's multi-layered, gendered identity, is her father's curtailing of the possibility of her marriage, to Sikander or anyone. In order to further lend weight to his objection to the union and the suitor himself, Habib invokes the aid of an even more senior patriarch than himself, his father and chief feudal overlord in the village, Siraj Din. He responds to Zarri Bano's mother's plea for his blessing:

Alongside our land, our wives and daughters, our *izzat*- our honour- is the most precious thing in our lives. We never *ever* compromise on the issue of our women and our *izzat*. (Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, p.34)

In making such a proclamation, the chief landlord has unwittingly exposed the contingent foundations of his ideology. The rationale for gendered and familial control is decidedly entrenched in land. So that out of such a realisation, and bearing all the exigencies that still circumscribe any effective response to a deeply rooted patriarchal order in mind, the text proceeds to re-imagine the gendered, national and cultural landscape through the very traditions that order reinforces itself through.

The marriage of Zarri Bano to The Holy Quran is both the stage where such a refashioning is enacted and the symbolic site at which localised rural patriarchies both enunciate themselves and unravel. Once it becomes patently obvious that the heroine's sacrificial gesture signifies nothing beyond the preservation of land, the ritual struggles to reify itself ideologically. And at this point, gendered identity across various spectrums, not just the religiously cultivated, becomes vulnerable to questioning, threatening to collapse under the weight of their own contingencies. Zarri Bano's ceremonial veiling therefore *unveils* the material conditions underpinning the interpellation of identity and subjectivity for women such as herself. This is apparent in her impassioned response as her father dictates her fate to her for the first time:

'I want to be normal woman, Father, and live a normal life! I want to get married. I am not a very religious person, as you know. I am twentieth-century, modern, educated woman. I am not living in the Mughal period- a pawn in a game of male chess. Don't you see, Father, I have hardly ever prayed in my life nor opened the Holy Quran on a regular basis.'

(Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, p.90)

Yet even as she reasons forlornly, the implications of her words appear to unravel before her. Her father's actions have suddenly brought the whole concept of normality as far as women and their socially constituted roles are concerned, into sharp focus. A contradiction begins to emerge in what Zarri Bano is saying here. Being a 'normal

woman' and leading 'a normal life', rather than offering a magical passport to enfranchisement, itself entails being 'pawn in a male game of chess'. The central protagonist's 'twentieth-century, modern' education, far from safeguarding her entry into such a world, acts as a facilitator in a very ideologically specific construction of the 'normal woman'. She may be 'educated' and dress in a manner that is less conservative than her female contemporaries in the village, but her identity, 'the essence of her womanhood', is still defined by her place in the patriarchal hierarchy which involves heterosexual love, marriage and children (Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, p.92). This is the type of 'normality' that a cherished union with Sikander would have provided her with. Very quickly, however, Zarri Bano becomes aware of the precarious foundations undergirding the 'choices' available to her:

'The Holy Woman. The woman he [Habib] created by killing me. Did you not know that men are the true creators in our culture, Mother? They mould our lives and destinies according to their whims and desires. The irony of all ironies, for which I can never forgive myself, is that it has happened to me- a feminist, a defender of women's rights. I have been living in a glass house of make-believe.' (Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, p.94)

Hence whether she opts for a ceremonial marriage to the Quran and a life shaped by apparent enclosure and devotion to her religion, or marriage to Sikander, the hero, and the promise of a 'freedom' that is very much ideologically circumscribed, Zarri Bano's agency, her identity, will always be the product of epistemic violence, conspicuous only by its absence on the margins of competing essentialisms.

In this rather bleak landscape, it is logical to question what is actually enabling about the veiled identity the heroine of the novel assumes. It is important to tread carefully here as it would be specious to suggest that Zarri Bano's shrouded appearance offers some kind of transformative potential. Yet if her imposed role is not

a starting point for the conscious performance of various identities, whose material parameters have now become transparent, there is little doubt *The Holy Woman* of the title is the spring board for a visible (re)configuration. From behind her religious garb and the authority it gives her, Zarri Bano feels empowered enough to expose how the 'identity' of the Pakistani woman cannot transcend its own materiality. The role she occupies is a corporeal testament to this, where the previously mythical, essentialist significance of religion is reduced to the symbolic, unable to escape what it is a mere patina for, which is ultimately the preservation of land and wealth through the enclosure of the female body. And it is with the body that Zarri Bano begins to explore the enabling possibilities of her position:

The cloak hid the shape of her body totally. 'I could be fifteen stones in weight and obese, but nobody would know the difference,' Zarri Bano mused. In effect nobody would ever guess that apart from a silky slip and other pieces of lingerie, she wore nothing else. (Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, p.162)

Zarri Bano's newly veiled persona provides her with a position from which she can interrogate the way her body was figured and represented in her previous, 'liberated' existence. Far from rendering her invisible, the covered position becomes an enlightening one in that it illuminates, for her, how the 'norm' that she once craved was one in which her corporeal appearance was shaped by the politics of various benign patriarchies. The way her body was figured changed accordingly as she was exchanged between the spaces of these subtly distinct frameworks. 'Propriety' in this sense would necessitate that she appear differently in front of her father to the 'fashionable' sartorial elegance that her meetings with Sikander or a trip to the village fete would otherwise demand. But the end game was still the same, with the control of the female body by either the paternalistic or sexually charged patriarchal gaze

marking the stable 'norm' of the 'ordinary woman' Zarri Bano assumed she always was (Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, p.159). Her 'identity' at this point becomes an entirely contingent, ideological construction.

It is interesting to question though, how Shahraz's heroine can become the subject of such a feminist epiphany from within the veil, an enclosed space which is ostensibly an anathema to the development of such a sensibility. This query however, in itself becomes victim to the immensely deconstructive and dissonant narrative manoeuvre Zarri Bano's veiling represents. The empowering possibilities of the shrouded identity lie not in face value obviously, but in the way that its very symbolic existence was undermined even before it entered Zarri Bano's textual life. No attempt is made to conceal the expedient materialism that underlies her father's reasoning to cloister her. And when the capitalist motivation does become obvious, the religious garb employed to bury it can no longer be divorced so seamlessly from its own contingencies and is emptied out of all its symbolic significance. The role Zarri Bano now occupies is one that is consciously aware of the preconditions of its feudal existence, where myth cannot transcend its own materiality. As a bride of the holy book, grand enunciations of 'ordinary' womanhood as an identity are no longer an essentialist given:

She has discovered a new lease of life in her *adopted* identity and has discovered a new world on an international scale. My daughter admirably suits the role. (Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*, p.389 emphasis mine)

The ceremonial tradition Zarri Bano's was subjected to, in attempting to efface her both spatially and geopolitically, ironically only succeeded in inflicting a damaging kind of violence upon itself, the kind of violence which dislodges 'identity' from the

essentialism it once confidently reified itself with. For Zarri Bano, these ‘identities’ are no longer atavistic but can be *adopted*. The neat binaries separating The Holy Woman from the coquettish fashionista to the obedient woman have been short circuited by the very framework they sustained. In looking to affect such a discontinuous change, the village patriarchy of Siraj Din and Habib Khan could not prevent the contingent foundations holding their fragile hegemony together from collapsing. As Zarri Bano was transformed from ‘ordinariness’ to Mother of her faith, crucially with the avaricious motives of such a manoeuvre barely disguised, the hallowed boundaries of Pakistani womanhood itself threaten to signify nothing more than the sum of their material parts, and can therefore be easily (re)fashioned. In this way, identity becomes a matter of choice for Zarri Bano and this choice is what is enabling about the predicament she finds herself in. Identity is now not a question of an essentialist way of being, but of reducing the latter to a matter of representational role play, a role play that is legitimised by the very patriarchy whose *raison d’être* it is to curtail such flexible movement, as it desperately attempts to recover its own lost reality principle. Becoming a Holy Woman was indeed just that, a question of *becoming*, where against a gendered historical backdrop in which the female body signified only through the violence inflicted on it, Zarri Bano’s veiled form *becomes* the site of an enabling reinscription. Her new role, as her mother Shahzada emphasises in the above quotation, provides her with more than a belated geopolitical mobility. Zarri Bano finds herself travelling to Egypt, England and the Far East in the capacity of a religious ambassador. These excursions see her transform what is a very localised, dubious expression of canonical Islam into a persona, one that acquires increasing authority in the academic circles she frequents. What is interesting here, however, is that Zarri Bano herself is consciously aware of the feudalistic motives

underlying her current role and this produces a dissonant contradiction. To all intents and purposes, she has embraced the religiously rooted ‘opportunities’ that being a Holy Woman appears to have opened up for her, yet simultaneously she has clearly not invested in her new identity beyond the representational, the trauma of the Machiavellian gendered violence she was victim of lying all too fresh in her memory. As her family attempt to coax her out of her ‘adopted’ role to marry Sikander after the death of her sister, his ex-wife, she is in the sort of position which her enabling, representation based political position is ideally situated to fashion a resistance against. In this instance however, it is her very presence that is precarious to a patriarchy which threatens to cave in on itself once again. As a veiled Holy Woman, Zarri Bano’s body figures purity and eternal chastity, yet by simply suggesting she repudiate such a commitment, her elders are undermining it, and she is aware of this. She is also aware though of what the hero’s benign patriarchy signifies for her, and she proceeds to marry him for the sake of his young son, her nephew, but entirely on her own terms, which actually involve *maintaining* her persona as veiled priestess, thereby reclaiming her body and denying Sikander the sexual access which he would feel is his by cultural and religious rights. The climax of this, ostensibly, most conventional romance is ambiguous at best, with the future of both hero and heroine far from symbolising the ‘promised land’ that is common in the genre. In this fissured text, the heroine’s assertiveness and opposition is more than just an adjunct to a fairy tale patriarchal ending. Zarri Bano fashions a resistance from within the very ideology that would seek to enclose her. Moreover, it is this enclosure which proves decisive. Unable, as it is, to signify beyond its own glaring contingencies, it becomes enabling as it is always short-circuited through a refashioning from within its own dubious logic. Underlying Zarri Bano’s consciously mediated role play appears to be an

awareness that resistance which remains outside the logic of what it is opposing, risks collapsing under its own vulnerable materiality.

It must be reiterated here that Shahraz's epic romance text is a simulacra of the discourses she, in many ways, nostalgically re-imagines the Sindhi landscape of her past through. Yet the type of destabilising feminist intervention that emerges in the shape of her *Holy Woman* does not become enclosed in its own 'hyperreality'. The risk with this type of representational politics in a feminist sense, one that has indeed been of great concern throughout this thesis, is that it threatens to become hegemonic in its own right, where any alternative discursive or political intervention is repudiated because a preoccupation with the material is not its defining principle. This is avoided in Shahraz's text, even though it appears in every way to be vulnerable to such criticism. The pleasures her novel speaks to, both in a contemporary sense and those it seeks to recapture in the past, are energised by very specific historical processes shaping the ongoing conflict between gender and nation in Pakistan. Zarri Bano's reclamation of her body within the ideological frameworks of the various local and national patriarchies that would seek to possess and enclose it never becomes lost in its own representation or materiality. Instead, such a gendered politics of the body actually stems from an awareness of what is lost, what is perpetually on the margins. What was empowering, therefore, for the heroine of Shahraz's romance, was not the forming of her own illusory opposition, in which she was either sustaining patriarchy, or marginalising 'other' Pakistani women from different classes and ethnicities, but instead always remaining in that space which is between even the in between, revealing what is alienated and marginalised from behind the patina of ideological legitimacy. At a time when Pakistan was seeing an unprecedented rise in feminist opposition to the institutionalised gendered violence of the Zia regime, the guerrilla

resistance of a Zarri Bano would have undoubtedly resonated with Pakistani women across different class and ethnic spectrums. The kind of specific, localised patriarchal practices such as the wedding of the bride to the holy book were ones that Zia had ironically attempted to eradicate and bring under the banner of his own nationally marked, gendered ideology. He initially had to support powerful feudal regions such as the Sindh as a precursor to gaining political power, and this arrived with a tacit understanding that such traditions as depicted in Shahraz's novel would inevitably continue.⁵⁶ Nostalgic romances such as *The Holy Woman* therefore, suggest that whilst opposition to Zia's policies continued to be orchestrated on a national level, the most significant subversion was being expressed by women, across the discrete, localised spaces of Pakistan, and within the pleasures they derived from their reading practices.

A Life in Purdah- The Politics of Zarri Bano's Veiled Subversion

Zarri Bano's black shroud appears to be the lingering, iconic image of Shahraz's epic as she leaves the novel with husband and stepson in tow and more significantly, a future which is mired in uncertainty. On the surface, and certainly as far as a postmodern expression of feminist subversion is concerned, her veil is a symbol whose status has been transformed by its Holy Woman from fixed to floating sign. It is a sign that is now unable signify unless she presses it into the service of her body, a sign that takes on a multitude of significations depending on the social context Zarri Bano finds herself in. She appropriates it on a symbolic and textual level, and is empowered because her use of it, her performance within its concealed social and

⁵⁶ Arif Mahmud, *Working with Zia: Pakistan's Power Politics 1977-1988* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

cultural space, never transcends the representational. Her subversion is, therefore, mediated solely across the veil's social and religious ratifications, it cannot be challenged, either when she refuses to remove it when she is moving around her own house or when she is 'released' from her vows and ordered to marry Sikander and become a 'normal' woman. The culturally constructed line between 'normality' and 'holy' is traversed and destabilised from behind her new veiled self. From a position that affords her the flexibility of occupying both the centre and margin, Zarri Bano exposes the contingent natures of the frameworks that had previously interpellated her so seamlessly.

And yet there is something lacking in such a reading. This is not to dismiss it out of hand, on the contrary the merits of a postmodern interpretation of Shahraz's postcolonial cultural form complements the feminist framework of her text, illuminating the play of representation and agency. As with all readings stemming from such an approach however, caution must be employed when textuality becomes all that is left, with politics and context having been emptied. It must be remembered that the veil, in the context of Pakistani, postcolonial feminism, maps out its own turbulent narrative in terms of its relationship with the country's nationalist movements, a narrative that is very much germane to Zarri Bano's performance:

The veil is often perceived as an icon of female oppression and inflects patriarchal and religious anxieties about femininity. Veiling or unveiling of women at different points in a country's evolution testifies to the direction in which the ascending groups propel their ideological control over the people. Women are expected to mediate their position through the "veiled body". In Pakistan, institutionalising the veil as the "national" dress constrained women in a similar way. Regulations placed emphasis on covering the head with a veil or scarf, recouping culturally defined notions of tradition.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Neluka Silva, *The Gendered Nation: Contemporary Writings From South Asia* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004), p.209.

It is fair to suggest then that Purdah or the practice of veiling is more than a simple textual symbol but actually a material repository for reading the way culture, nationalism and religion has figured the female body across Pakistani history. It is an awareness of these contexts that energises expressions of feminist subversion and underpins the representation of the veil within Shahraz's postmodern rendition of the historical romance. Against the backdrop of the Zia regime, where the veiled body is an obviously amplified concern, it is pertinent to return briefly to the work of those pioneering authors and activists who led the feminist response against his policies. In the poem already mentioned in this Chapter, 'Chaadar aur Char Diwari' by Fahmida Riaz, the veil becomes the site of controlled and skilfully crafted polemic, where it is stripped from its religious mythos and exposed for what it represents, a tool for sustaining patriarchy and sexual control over the female body. The Purdah in fact figures prominently in the seminal compilation which Riaz's poem was a part of.⁵⁸ And Neluka Silva describes the significance of a trope that is powerfully recognisable in the subversive work of Shahraz's novel:

The unveiled body becomes the locust of lust because it moves into a destination which is unmarked, unmapped, naked, in contrast to the veiled body which is topographically mapped out for a patriarchal agenda. The female body, when it is not regulated by the reality of the veil, carries a potential threat of destabilising the material, reproductive base of the nation state.⁵⁹

Zarri Bano memorably comments on her nakedness beneath her veil, and the feeling of liberation this provides. What is ironic and makes her actions even more powerfully subversive is that appearing naked in any shape or form without the veil

⁵⁸ *We Sinful Women: Contemporary Urdu Feminist Poetry*, ed. by Rukhsana Ahmad (London: The Women's Press, 1991). This is a groundbreaking anthology of poetry by feminist activists and writers during the Zia period including Riaz. Particularly significant poems include 'Women and Salt' by Sara Shagufta, 'She is a Woman Impure' again by Riaz and 'Liberation' by Ishrat Aafreen.

⁵⁹ Silva, p.212.

would have been an impossibility and most definitely had violent consequences. Zarri Bano has, therefore, fashioned a transgression that her veil has enabled. In this sense, the figuring of Purdah shares a continuity with the literary discourses of the historical period of the novel, but there are also nuanced differences in the way subversion is represented. When Silva explains how the ‘naked’ female body is a site for masculine anxiety because it is ‘unmapped’, emphasising new and dangerous territory that the poets imagine a feminist utopia through, this does not quite find echoes in Shahraz’s novel. The nakedness notwithstanding, in Zarri Bano’s world there is not a clear binary between what is ‘mapped’ and what is not. In fact, all expressions of the female body, naked or clothed, stylised or plain, are in some way regulated. The subversion here is fashioned from within the limits of that regulation’s most iconic and ostensibly repressive form, the veil. For Zarri Bano, control over her body and the way it is figured and represented is fashioned precisely from within the bounds of what would ordinarily deny such a representation. The veil, then, is clearly not repudiated in the same way.

‘allow yourself to discover the joys of womanhood’- The Epilogue

The purpose of this Chapter has been to demonstrate the unique trajectory the development of Pakistani women writing took in the form of the popular romance during the period of General Zia’s reign. The adoption of such a globalised generic form inevitably provokes the immediate queries of what exactly in itself the romance, in terms of its enduring, conventional narrativity, ideological work and textual pleasures, has to offer writing that is taking place in a radically different context. Janice Radaway’s *Reading the Romance*, astutely unpacks the discursive frameworks

underpinning the genre, viewing it as an industry that has a dialectical relationship with its white, middle-class, female readers. Her work is the most notable of a number of similar efforts that aim to theorise and understand the discourse against the reading practices of its audience. However, her conclusions, grounded in psychoanalysis, prove somewhat reductive and unsatisfactory, where her readers are ‘rescued’ from feminism’s furthest margins, only to be enveloped once again in a universal paradigm that views them all as employing their novels to compensate for the ‘love’ and ‘appreciation’ that they do not receive in their homes. A compulsion for such literature and what it represents, it appears, is really a sublimation of the woman’s desire to return to her mother. The way feminist criticism in this field developed moved away from such a position without failing to acknowledge the significance of the work of Radaway and her contemporaries. However, there still remains a disconnect in applying such criticisms when the literary and reading practice of the romance is being fashioned and enacted in a completely different, ‘other’, geopolitical space.

Very little research has been conducted in this area, even in the Indian context. What I have concluded from my research is that examples of the rise in romance literature during the period in question have to be theorised against the historical context of Pakistan at the time, and, significantly, the legacy of the relationship feminist interventions of the past have had with the country’s previous nationalism and their discourses. This is why a novel like *The Holy Woman*, a nostalgic recreation of a period in Pakistani history where the effects of Zia’s policies were still resonating around the country, cannot just be viewed as pastiche. There are elements of playful bricolage of course, but the central, female, protagonist’s subversive challenge to her environment and route to agency has to be seen less against feminist expressions of

postmodern performativity and more in terms of the historical and social processes that have enabled such a literary expression. The representational work of the romance in the Pakistani sense is, therefore, transformed, especially where the female body is concerned. For so many years past the site of literal and epistemic violence, the body in Shahraz's romance is ironically able to inscribe, and enunciate after it is inscribed upon. And this inscription, and attempt to control and silence the way the body figures is the preserve of both cultural and historical process and the romance discourse itself. Important to such an expression was a feminist movement that has been described as 'the most militant and well defined in Asia', responding to Zia's socio-religious nationalist policies.⁶⁰ The correlation between an activism acutely conscious of a history shaped by violence against the female body, and a literary practice that cleverly crafts subversion and agency out of a hegemonic cultural form which seems unsustainable, appears, in my opinion, powerfully coincidental.

⁶⁰ Fareeda Shaheed and Khawar Mumtaz, 'The Rise of the Religious Right and its Impact on Women', *South Asia Bulletin*, 10.2 (1990), 9-17 (p.11). For a discussion on the social and historical significance of *Purdah* see *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?* (New Jersey: Zed Books, 1987) by the same authors. Silva's book also contains a fascinating analysis of the veil as subversive trope in Rushdie's *Shame*.

CHAPTER 4

DIASPORA AND THE POLITICAL POETICS OF MIGRATION

Feroza loaded her suitcases and hand luggage on the cart. Her mind was now filled with images of the slender young American and his candid, admiring eyes. How easily he had talked to her, his gestures open, confident. She wished she could have responded to his readiness to be friends, but she was too self-conscious. That was it: the word she was looking for to define her new experience. He was unselfconscious.¹

[...] transnational or *neocolonial* capitalism, like colonialist capitalism before it, continues to produce sites of contradiction that are effects of its always uneven expansion but that cannot be subsumed by the logic of commodification itself. [...] “culture” obtains a “political” force when a cultural formation comes into contradiction with economic or political logics that try to refunction it for exploitation or domination.²

In the exchanges of traditional symbols with international communications circuits, culture industries, and migrations, questions about identity and the national, the defense of sovereignty, and the unequal appropriation of knowledge and art do not disappear. The conflicts are not erased, as neoconservative postmodernism claims. They are placed in a different register, one that is multifocal and more tolerant, and the autonomy of each culture is rethought- sometimes- with smaller fundamental risks.³

¹ *An American Brat*, p.92.

² Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, ‘Introduction to the Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Late Capital’, in *Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. by Raiford A. Guins and Omayra Zaragoza Cruz (London: Sage, 2005), pp.126-146 (p.130).

³ Nestor Garcia Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. by Christopher L. Chiappiari and Silvia L Lopez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p.240-241.

The Diasporic Turn in Pakistani Women's Literature

The image of the transnational, diasporic intellectual and writer is not particularly new to Pakistani migrant literature. Indeed, some of the most famous sons of the wider canon of 'South Asian writing' are, in fact, either from the region or had migrated to it after Partition. Salman Rushdie is perhaps the most obvious example, although being one of 'Midnight's Children' he would much rather prefer to be referred to as Indian, if even that. Hanif Kureishi, described by Feroza Jussawalla as 'probably the most hybrid of the South Asian diaspora writers in Britain', is another prominent Pakistani diasporic writer. His work has become synonymous with the complex identity politics produced at the site of conflict between Pakistani migrant culture and the nationalist ideology of (Thatcherite) Britain in particular.⁴ With the increasingly globalised flows of labour and intellectual capital, it appears inevitable that the subsequent 'transnational communities' created, will shape a specific type of diasporic writing by Pakistani women.⁵ Similar to many other postcolonial states, Pakistan has experienced a significant amount of immigration westward since its creation and continues to do so:

Large-scale migration of Asians, Africans and Europeans, was central in fashioning the world of the nineteenth century, its world-wide empires and the establishment of global and political dominance by people of European origin. Twentieth century migrations have been just as important, particularly in the creation of a post-World War and post-imperial world order. Asian peoples have been among the most central in these processes. By the last quarter of this century about nine million South Asians (Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis) [...] are to be found living outside their country of origin as a result of migration or birth within a migrant community. [...] Asian migration is, therefore, not only an important

⁴ Feroza Jussawalla, 'South Asian Diaspora Writers in Britain: "Home" Versus "Hybridity"', in *Ideas of Home: Literature of Asian Migration*, ed. by Geoffrey Kain (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997), pp.17-38 (p.17).

⁵ Arjun Appadurai, 'Sovereignty without Territoriality: Notes for a Postnational Geography', in *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, ed. by M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zuniga (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), pp.337-349 (p.338).

aspect of Asian history and the life experiences of people from that continent, but is also a part of the creative contribution of Asia and its peoples to the contemporary world.⁶

The important questions concern how texts by Pakistani women writers fit into existing theoretical frameworks for diasporic writing. To address these I will consider Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat* (1993), Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2002) and Uzma Aslam Khan's *Trespassing* (2004). In its themes and sensitive exploration of the gender politics of cross-cultural encounters, Sidhwa's novel has shaped the direction for more contemporary literature by Pakistani women. Its appeal has remained enduring, especially in diasporic locations, and Sidhwa has also adapted it for the stage, under a different title, *Sock 'em with Honey*.

In the fluid world of Arjun Appadurai, where cross border alliances are forged across porous boundaries, it seems that these authors have but two choices. They either embrace a literary landscape where all their discrete observations about the postcolonial, migratory condition reflect a postmodern sensibility, or risk anonymity by foregrounding dislocation and an 'outmoded' investment in the politics of 'home', 'culture' and nation. The quote by Jussawalla earlier about Kureishi is enlightening. It now appears 'diaspora' iconically and unproblematically signifies 'hybrid', with all its postmodern connotations. So that any intervention made by the writer entering this area has to travel the precarious continuum between being appropriated by the politics of global capitalism, or being textually committed to illuminating the many contradictions that the latter position produces. Such a framework is, however, dangerously reductive. It would be disingenuous to claim that at least one of the novels chosen does not reinforce the pleasures of the globalised, diasporic subject position, with all its associated limitations. But each text also figures the classic

⁶ Judith Brown and Rosemary Foot, 'Introduction', in *Migration: The Asian Experience*, ed. by Judith Brown and Rosemary Foot (New York: St. Martin's, 1994), pp.1-22 (p.1).

diasporic tropes of home, space, identity and the body in different ways, which can only be understood via a thorough engagement with the contexts the novels are speaking to.

It is not necessary to reach that far back into Pakistan's gendered literary history to establish a continuity between past and present historical trends. This thesis has already discussed, at length in its third Chapter, how the Partition of the Indian sub-continent, and the perilous journey it entailed, can also be viewed as a figurative partitioning of the female body. The nationalisms instrumental in the vivisection of the country also played themselves out across the bodies of Indian and Pakistani women. Rape, violence, murder, marital exchange and abduction were all legitimate inscriptions, ways through which Muslim and Hindu men communicated their masculinity to each other. In this respect, migration over the border to whichever country matched the three most powerful religious denominations was a dissonant experience for Muslim women travelling to Pakistan or Hindu/Sikh women whose journey lay in the other direction. The cases that involved abduction in such a harrowing narrative are of particular interest. In a situation where women were 'found', they would be taken home, usually after some form of assault, and then forcibly converted. Moreover, there were also recorded cases where women were exchanged amongst Hindu/Muslim families in return for land. In these scenarios there were also forced conversions. And yet, in a communally charged landscape where religion was often employed to essentialise ideologies and justify the violence perpetrated, exposing its contingent foundations in such a way was precarious. Where women were exchanged for land and then forced to convert, religion was reduced from an ideology that transcended the material, to one that was sustained by it. The essentialism it laid claim to was potentially emptied out, making religion a

performative identity. This corporeal route to agency however, remained limited against the backdrop of continued violence. Diasporic migration exposing the constructed nature of all culture and identity, where this becomes the site of bricolage and re-inscription, its purpose being to subvert and short-circuit through parody, is difficult when certain rape is what awaits the transnational female subject as she crosses the border, rather than the friendly faces of immigration and customs. Such a glance at the past is extremely relevant when exploring how contemporary Pakistani women writers confront the concerns of diasporic literature and mediate its themes and prevailing political sensibilities. This includes ways that the female body maps space, through absence or presence. And how the migrant yearns for or returns 'home' with their newfound transnational perspective.

The spectre of a relatively recent postcolonial trauma and dissonant migration is a salient context as Pakistani women writers negotiate the themes of diasporic postcolonial writing. Uzma Aslam Khan succinctly highlights the theoretical and contextual challenges that define contemporary diasporic fiction, in her review of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*:

The moral justification of 19th- and 20th-century colonialism was civilizing the native. The moral justification of 21st-century imperialism is liberating the native. Britain's jewel in the crown, the Indian subcontinent, is today being secured by those Asian-British writers who espouse the last line of Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane*: "This is England," she said. 'You can do whatever you like.'"

Ali's ending clinched the political banner sewn in the pages of the book – England equals freedom – though not until the final page was it made explicit. But novelists ought to be challenging slogans, not trumpeting them. If a banner is waved, it should be the banner of scepticism. What if Nazneen's sister in Bangladesh had found a good-looking young man to hump, dumping her stodgy husband in the process, and Nazneen had been locked in a room and raped by a racist white man who pimped her to more racist white men, and she'd begged for freedom only to be told, 'This is England. We can do whatever we like'? Today's "Asian" novelists face an unspoken list of *dos* and, implicitly, *don'ts*. First is the "West must save the East" dictum, which denies the enormous range of people who comprise a part of the world being written about almost entirely by those who've never, or barely, lived there.

Writing about a family from Bangladesh or Pakistan or India who actually live there is old-fashioned, and it's especially unfitting that the *author* live there. This is the second rule.

The hyphen (Anglo-Indian, Afghan-American) is what confers credibility; by emphasizing ethnic differences within Britain, banner-waving diaspora writers end up eliminating differences – by denying them *outside* of Britain.

"Multiculturalism" is, in fact, not multicultural at all. Asians living in Asia are only ever portrayed as reactionary dullards, while those who go West have but two roads to choose from: the backward path home, or the forward path of assimilation.⁷

Aslam Khan's ire, and the materialist response to the hybridised direction diasporic literature and criticism have taken, betrays the undoubted presence of Homi Bhabha's work on the way identity and agency are theorised across postcolonial discourse. The hybridised, postcolonial subject represents a contested, much debated space. And the criticism of Bhabha's philosophy, such as it is, is perhaps as much about interpretation and (mis)appropriation than the deliberately vague dynamics of what he is actually saying. This is an extract from one of his rare interview pieces:

The postcolonial perspective resists attempts at holistic forms of social explanation. I question the traditional liberal attempt to negotiate a coming together of minorities on the basis of what they have in common and what is consensual. In my writing, I've been arguing against the multiculturalist notion that you can put together harmoniously any number of cultures in a pretty mosaic. You cannot just solder together different cultural traditions to produce some brave new cultural totality. The current phase of economic and social history makes you aware of cultural difference *not* at the celebratory level of diversity but always at the point of conflict or crisis.⁸

This is really rather illuminating from a theorist whose work is supposed to represent little more than an apologetic expression of a postmodern orientalism. Bhabha has, however, consistently espoused the sort of theoretical perspective delineated above. Hybridity as a postcolonial condition is forged out of the contingency of *all* 'cultural difference', it is a material bricolage, a consciously mediated performance that is

⁷ Uzma Aslam Khan, "'The West Must Save the East'" in *The Drawbridge*, 7 (2007), http://www.thedrawbridge.org.uk/issue_7/the_west_must_save_the_east/. (Accessed 5 February 2011)

⁸ Homi Bhabha, 'Art and National Identity: A Critics' Symposium', Interview with Brian Wallis, *Art in America*, 79.9 (1991), 70-91 (p.82).

acutely aware of the constructed nature of its precarious textual constituents. As Bhabha has explained in his previous work, most notably *The Location of Culture*, the potential for re-fashioning, where the hybridised subject can at once occupy the 'here' of the hegemonic, and the 'there' of the marginal, is enabled through 'conflict' and 'crisis', and does not exist in a transcendental relationship to violence. It is in fact in this initial moment of discontinuity- between the 'self' and the 'other', the coloniser and the colonised, a space of 'conflict'- where hegemonic or colonial ideology becomes destabilised and cannot hold onto its essentialism. The question is how this, and Bhabha's latest old yet new rhetoric translates into the fissured, migratory spaces of the diasporic writer, their literature and the critical responses to their work.

Aslam Khan has made her thoughts very clear on the impact of his observations, which, although implicit, are still obvious in terms of their target. She suggests 'the hyphen is what confers credibility' and is scathing in her claim that 'banner waving diaspora writers end up eliminating differences- by denying them *outside* of Britain'. Hybridity, therefore, becomes less a route to agency through dissonance and more an aesthetic which enables global mobility through expressing 'otherness' in a way that makes it most accessible or fit for consumption by the neocolonial, capitalist world. The 'harmonious multiculturalist notion' of 'cultural mosaic' that Bhabha emphasises is, ironically, the kind of literary landscape Aslam Khan is referring to. As a 'diaspora writer', it is 'transnational' literary capital that interpellates the textual choices which are made, the type of narrative of 'otherness' the 'transnational' market wants to consume and the construction of 'otherness', across sexuality, class and race that it desires to consume. In the diasporic writer's cultural frame of reference, the landscape that has been left behind, where the migration has been made from, is textually flattened. It becomes homogenous, as Aslam Khan suggests and most significantly, a

space devoid of ‘difference’, where this can only be ventriloquised through its relationship to the host country, a ‘hyphenated relationship’.

This does not reflect Bhabha’s theoretical approach. Migratory literature appears amenable to his observations because ‘cultural difference’, dislodged from its essentialism, is no longer relevant to the postcolonial condition. The politics of multiculturalism, ostensibly prevalent in diasporic literature and ‘traditional liberal’ perspectives, is repudiated by Bhabha not out of right-wing anxieties, but because it returns transcendental essentialism to categories of difference and identity that are clearly constructed. In a society underpinned by the ‘notion’ of a ‘cultural mosaic’, essentialised categories of cultural difference are always ideologically motivated. Where there is not an awareness that these identities are material and constructed, they will ‘betray evidence of excluded others’ at the moment they are enunciated.⁹ So there appears to be a case of misconception, if not misinterpretation, between Bhabha’s theory and the way many critics and practitioners feel it manifests itself in the practice of migration literature. There is a difference though, between imagining the hybridity of the postcolonial subject as a condition deliberately underpinned by a lack of ‘totality’ and the appropriation of such a political aesthetic. As David Huddart explains, ‘tense negotiation- agonism – is for Bhabha both necessary and ongoing. Such agonism is best exemplified in the migrant experience’.¹⁰ The fluid traversing of boundaries and borders stems from the identity of the migrant subject being the site of constant negotiation and change, under construction as it were. The moment it re-invests itself with an essentialism that has proven to be unsustainable, it disintegrates.

⁹ David Huddart, ‘Hybridity and Cultural Rights’, in *Reconstructing Hybridity: Post-colonial Studies in Translation*, ed. by Joel Kuortti and Jopi Nyman (Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 2007), pp.21-41 (p.36).

¹⁰ Huddart, p.30.

Before clarifying Bhabha's position on a topic he has been consistently criticised for ignoring, history, it is important to briefly address some extraordinarily vehement criticism he received from a fellow Parsee in the academy, Feroza Jussawalla:

In the contemporary situation, "hybridity" fits into the liberal white American agenda as embodied in certain academic centres and certain power centres not only in the Clinton administration but among the conservatives who like to see "mainstreaming" and assimilation and other forms of "universal standardization." [...] even radical theories of difference simply become co-opted into the white liberal ACLU "political correctness" now being dismantled by angry white male legislator [...] hybridity remains what I have come to call Bhabha Babooism.¹¹

This is, of course, a ruthless insight into not only Bhabha's theory, but those whose work Jussawalla feels has been inflected by it in the wider neo-colonial canon of 'hybridity'. The word "Baboo" is a Hindi term coined in colonial times on the Indian sub-continent, to describe those individuals that served in the Raj's administration, who were perceived as classic 'mimic men', aspiring to impersonate their colonial masters. In this respect, she leaves no doubt about how she reads postmodern expressions of postcoloniality such as Bhabha's. It is ironic, however, that the 'mimic man' should feature in her criticism, since Bhabha himself employs the trope as the beginning of the end for the coloniser's racist identity politics. Perhaps Jussawalla would be better served in interrogating exactly what the implications are of her allegedly 'progressive' postcolonial politics, expressed thus:

[...] the more rooted the writer in his own indigenous culture, the better he can understand/interpret/ represent the other culture and also portray his own immediate locale/"location" with mastery. Therefore despite mixing and merging, like a martini in a cocktail shaker, the writers do not become hybrids or "mongrels," and we do not need a median point along the "scale" or "cline" of authenticity to alienation indicating "hybridity".¹²

¹¹ Jussawalla, p.21.

¹² Jussawalla, p.23.

One might question what the ‘indigenous culture’ of the writer entails, let alone their ‘mastery’ of said culture. It appears that Jussawalla, as well as being extremely disgruntled with the ‘mongrelisation’ of what she clearly perceives as separate, essentialised ideological totalities, is evoking some sort of utopian, transcendence of material politics through literary ‘mastery’. Whether or not she has conflated Bhabha’s theory with its textual and academic appropriation is a moot point, but the potential repercussions of her proposed solutions to the ‘Bhabha Babooisms’ are more troubling.

History’s DissemiNation

Homi Bhabha’s postmodern refashioning of the postcolonial subject illuminates significant trends within postcolonial writing itself. For Bhabha, the ‘strategy has been to interpret the effect of encounters rather than to mythologize the structure of the journey’. ¹³ The discourse posits the reclaiming of cultural memory, subjectivity and agency not at the site of totality but at the limits of that totality. Here the sign is constantly vulnerable to collapse and a reinscription can occur within representation, not outside it. Hence there is a recognition that ‘the nonsequential energy of lived historical memory’ cannot be mediated except through ‘an appropriate narrative authority’; postcolonial agency is forged in the moments where these ‘narrative authorities’ ‘interrupt the successive seriality of the narratives of plurals and

¹³ Nikos Papastergiadis, ‘Ambivalence in Cultural Theory: Reading Homi Bhabha’s “DissemiNation”’, in *Critical Studies, Vol 7: Writing the Nation: Self and Country in Post-Colonial Imagination*, ed. by John C. Hawley (Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 1996), pp.176-193 (p.179).

pluralism'.¹⁴ The linear progression of 'history' across past, present and future is deconstructed by Bhabha. 'Historical memory' is 'nonsequential' because of the *awareness* that the 'past' cannot escape its own narration; as soon as it occurs in reality it becomes mediated and part of a 'hyperreality', whether through precolonial orality or neo-colonial media. If time cannot exist beyond representation, the exposing of this through the appropriation of the material past, present and future and the consequent disruption of linearity, emphasises that the concept of an 'homogeneous nation' is ultimately tenuous, embedded in 'empty, homogeneous time'.¹⁵

The 'other' side of the coin, of course, is presented to Bhabha by a host of discontented voices both from within postcolonial discourse and other fields, as the Jussawalla response earlier indicates. The pressing concern is how one can treat the violence and displacement of the colonial experience, which underpin its history, as a sign suspended in 'aporia', forever deferred and only accessible via the discourses that represent it.¹⁶ All the attention to the precarious nature of 'fixed origins' in the world, however, cannot efface from 'historical memory' the death of one million people as India was partitioned and Pakistan formed. One is reminded of Stephan Slemon's contention that whilst deconstructive postmodernism may share similarities with postcolonial discourse, the importance for the latter to return to a 'referent' grounded in a distinct cultural identity that has survived despite brutal attempts to erase it, is what fundamentally differentiates it from its 'Western' counterpart.¹⁷

¹⁴ Homi Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation', in *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.291-323, (p.179 and p.185).

¹⁵ Bhabha, 1990, p.239.

¹⁶ Bhabha, 1994, p.185.

¹⁷ Stephen Slemon, 'Modernism's Last Post' in Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin, eds., *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp.1-11 (p.5).

Along these lines, Benita Parry calls for a ‘turn from rhetoric disparaging master narratives of revolution and liberation, and a return to the politics grounded in the material, social, and existential’.¹⁸ Clearly, ‘resistance as the experiential reality and social practice of human subjects’ can no longer be ‘dismissed as repeating the error of a discredited humanism’.¹⁹ These arguments, however, appear to be rather weak. If one of the main oppositions to Bhabha and the postmodern postcolonialism he perpetuates is that the ‘native’ cannot exist outside the discourse legitimised by the coloniser, that of self/other, centre/periphery, Parry’s call for some kind of organic ‘experiential reality’ is just as complicit with that very discourse. The ‘master narratives’ drew their power from effacing their own material, ideological conditions and therefore appearing universal and essential. The contradiction lies in whether it is progressive, in terms of fashioning postcolonial agency, to suddenly decide that ‘discredited humanism’ does not want its grand narratives anymore but that ‘natives’ cannot do without them.

The aim here is certainly not to discredit the ‘referent’ but to briefly interrogate what Bhabha’s position on history really is. Parry’s critique falls rather short when applied to Partition. Partha Chatterjee has already demonstrated how monolithic conceptions of the national actually precluded many of the postcolonial subjects of Indian society that Parry perceives rather homogeneously.²⁰ The binary becomes quite slippery when violence occurs in a postcolonial context. The British had left India when Pakistan was forged, ‘the negligent surgeon carving the earth’, and the displaced people in between Indian and Muslim nationalism certainly have no grand

¹⁸ Benita Parry, ‘Directions and Dead Ends in Postcolonial Studies’, in *Relocating Postcolonialism*, ed. by, David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp.66-81 (p.77).

¹⁹ Parry, p.77.

²⁰ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.113.

narrative to turn to. The point is that it is simply wrong to suggest that Bhabha's postcolonial theory effaces history:

The familiar space of the Other (in the process of identification) develops a graphic historical and cultural specificity in the splitting of the postcolonial or migrant subject. In place of that 'I' - institutionalised in the visionary, authorial ideologies of *Eng. Lit.* or the notion of 'experience' [...] there emerges the challenge to see what is invisible.²¹

It is apparent that for Bhabha the violence of history, whether this be in a colonial or postcolonial context, renders colonial enunciation precarious and postcolonial agency possible. The discontinuous nature of this violence makes the totalising narratives that underpinned it impossible to return to. The constructedness of both 'authorial ideology' and the 'experience' of traditional orality, where Parry might locate 'native' agency, unravels. Difference is located within representation, a part of material practice, and it is here where the 'invisible' emerge from the margins, appropriating, mimicking, destabilising. Transcending the binaries into 'origin' or 'essence' is made untenable by the very historical process Bhabha is accused of eliding. The important question of what exactly postcolonial history is transcending into is thrown into sharp focus. And what is revealed is simply another set of totalising representations that have their own 'traces' and gaps, those 'one million dead Indians' who could not find a place in 'Indian nationalism'. The pastiche of these representations creates a jarring effect which can dislodge any ideological paradigm from its essentialism. 'Historical specificity' therefore is contingent and enunciated always with this contingency in mind, where 'experiential realities' are not eschewed but appropriated, reduced and interrogated for what is 'invisible'.

²¹ Bhabha, 1994, p.47.

The materialist dismissal of hybrid performativity is effective to a point, until it posits its own, untenably essentialist position, be this grounded in a Marxist or feminist approach. Chapter 1 argued how a gendered narrative position of silence in particular is produced at the margins of both Bhabha's and Judith Butler's postcolonial and postmodern feminist constructions of agency. The type of politics espoused, especially in the case of Pakistani women writers and their narratives, created epistemic absence rather than agency. The female subject in these narratives could not negotiate the type of exigencies their bodies were the subject of through a hybridised, aporia inducing performance, even though the Partition amply provided the migratory preconditions of such an intervention. However, the literature of Qaisra Shahraz emphasised that if the right contextual factors are in place, such a postmodern imagining of feminist agency is possible, and actually immensely subversive. And this is where hybridity should be located in its relationship to diasporic literature. As a paradigm, its politics are defined by 'conflict' and 'crises', conflict and contradiction, so it is hard to see why its representation, and the reading of this representation in diasporic literature, should suddenly become unproblematic. Jopi Nyman, a prolific exponent of a hybridised postcolonial criticism, inadvertently highlights such a paradox:

The diasporic location, then, can be seen as a liminal space of identity, as a space where various transnational forces, both local and global, remould identity. In this sense diasporic identity can be addressed as a form of hybridized identity, as it is a space of inbetweenness where the diasporic subject reconstructs itself, problematizing the issues of home, belonging, and nation, as outlined by the postcolonial theorist Homi K Bhabha.²²

The critic also, however, appears to curiously interrogate this position:

²² Jopi Nyman, *Home, Identity and Mobility in Contemporary Diasporic Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 2009), p.22.

As I have suggested, the contemporary use of diaspora emphasizes that its modern forms are closely linked with the ever-increasing development of a global capitalism that moves capital and labour from one space to another, wherever cheap workers are needed. It should be emphasized that the narratives of diaspora do not only consist of novels telling of free-floating subjects entering new worlds and acquiring new identities in an unproblematic manner.²³

This is somewhat confusing. Are these ‘cheap workers’, the human factor in the transnational flow of ‘capital and labour’, also privileged with the ‘hybridized identity’ that, according to Nyman, so unproblematically defines the ‘diasporic location’? It is easy to see how such a position can become susceptible to a materialist critique. The problem with postcolonial hybridity is not the theory, but the way this theory is expressed in literary and academic practice. A reconfiguration is required which makes these spaces alive to historical and literary contextualisation, so the use of hybridized performativity, and the way it is read in diasporic literature, is relevant in the way it is in Shahraz’s novel. Here the reclaiming of the romance novel, a genre synonymous with patriarchal ideologies, is energised by the resurgence of Pakistani feminism, immensely significant to the historical moment Shahraz chooses for *The Holy Woman*. Jan Nederveen Pieterse points the potential path forward:

Acknowledging the contingency of boundaries and the significance and limitations of hybridity as a theme and approach means engaging hybridity politics. This is where critical hybridity comes in, which involves a new awareness of and new take on the dynamics of group formation and social inequality. This critical awareness is furthered by acknowledging rather than suppressing hybridity.²⁴

²³ Nyman, p.21.

²⁴ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, ‘Hybridity, So What? The Anti-Hybridity Backlash and the Riddles of Recognition’, in *Theory, Culture and Society*, 18.2-3 (2001), 219-245 (p.239).

This establishes an illuminating framework for the three novels in question by Sidhwa, Aslam Khan and Shamsie. These texts are undoubtedly the products of the historical migratory trends and patterns discussed. A ‘critical hybridity’, where representation is constantly subject to interrogation, will help highlight how the novels construct the Pakistani woman’s diasporic subjectivity across the tropes of the body, home, nation and sexuality, in a way that is aware of the contextual issues each one speaks to.

Mapping the Global

If the ‘postcolonial’ unproblematically denotes the ‘transnational’ subject with all the accompanying connotations, then the ‘transnational’ has now become the global. The challenge for literary theory and practice now lies in positing the postcolonial subject amidst the cross border flows of capital, information and bodies that have become an indelible part of the geopolitical space(s) it occupies. In his perceptive study of the way globalization has impacted on the field of postcolonial studies and beyond, Paul Jay suggests that there has indeed been ‘an apparent shift- from a postcolonial to a global perspective’. ²⁵ The faultlines of the argument, however, appear to have a familiar resonance:

If contemporary theory influenced by deconstruction has taught us anything, it is that the binary division between the economic and the cultural is a false one, that we need to interrogate how each term is constructed in contrast to the other and how the binary tends to mask a much more complicated set of processes than either term by itself can reference. ²⁶

²⁵ Paul Jay, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), p.30

²⁶ Jay, p.8.

Jay continues to elucidate what he sees as an 'economic' and 'cultural' position, with the former being a response to the global turn in postcolonial studies that is decidedly postmodern in approach. The 'cultural', as the opposite side of the binary, involves a celebration of the loose, aesthetically rooted identity which has stemmed from transitional alliances and porous borders. In other words, this is a return to the historically rooted social imperative versus vacuous performativity which only serves to sustain the inequalities of globalisation. Hybridity, therefore, becomes appropriated, emptied out of its political significance in a landscape that is not so much global, but the preserve of global capitalism. What is interesting in Jay's theorising is his commitment to 'interrogate how each term is constructed', rather than endorse one or the other. Literature of the globalised world, whether it is diasporic in form and content or otherwise, tends, according to Jay, to operate across a continuum between the two positions. These texts must be read with an awareness of the global contexts they speak to and the way these influence their representational work, and not simply to discern which side of the ideological fence they rest on. The significant factor for Jay is that of agency:

[...] agency has as much to do with the intelligent and imaginative negotiation of cross cultural contact than with avoiding such contact. Agency from this point of view, is a function of that negotiation, not its victim. And, clearly, agency is variously enabled and circumscribed by gender.²⁷

It appears here that the critic is firmly endorsing the postmodern stance which pervades contemporary postcolonial theory in his call for 'imaginative negotiation' of transnational flows, as opposed to a repudiation of those flows altogether. But there is also the notion that 'agency', in whatever form it manifests itself, should not be taken

²⁷ Jay, p.3.

at face value. As a 'construction', it is also 'circumscribed', be this in a typically diasporic narrative of the floating subject with loose ties to the global landscape, or one that foregrounds a tale of nationalist/classist liberation.

Theorising a route to agency in the complicated global landscape thus, has been a pressing pursuit amongst theorists of the global and postcolonial. In the way he feels globalization has opened up access to a diverse body of literature, enabling critical engagement with complex narratives and epistemologies, it would be fair to suggest that Jay does not view the transnational turn in entirely pejorative terms. Moreover, his critical stance is also evident as regards 'economic' and 'cultural' perspectives on the way global forces have impacted on the postcolonial, literary landscape. Responding to Masao Miyoshi's plea that an 'individual, a group, or a programme, requires a totality in which to position itself', a right which 'the cant of hybridity, nuance and diversity' has apparently obfuscated,²⁸ Jay gives no quarter:

[...] the kind of totality that Miyoshi endorses more often than not reduces, obscures, ignores or rejects the legitimacy of local and particular differences when they threaten the constructed coherence of a totalizing master narrative. It may be better to run the risk of making a fetish of local differences than erasing them in the interests of a larger, totalized good.²⁹

Even the 'history' that Miyoshi and Edward Said, in his later writings on 'globalised' postcoloniality, feel 'the cant of hybridity' effaces, bears the violent traces of 'totality'.³⁰ Ideologies of religion, nationalism and the like can be just as apolitical and ahistorical as the postmodernity they are an apparent antidote for, both in their

²⁸ Masao Miyoshi, "'Globalization,' Culture, and the University", in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. by Fredric Jameson and Miyoshi (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), pp.247-269 (p.42).

²⁹ Jay, p.30.

³⁰ Edward Said, 'Globalizing Literary Study', *PMLA: Special Issue*, 116.1 (2001), 64-68.

capacity to forget and their material, lived reality. The consumption of 'local differences' - where they are packaged and sold in digestible media across a globalised landscape that they then help to shrink and make 'knowable' - is precisely what motivated the materialist criticism from Mayoshi and others in the first instance. The challenges that globalisation poses to the literary and critical landscape in terms of postcolonial studies again lie in the interpretation, application and understanding of the theoretical terms being employed to illuminate such a complex reality. For Mayoshi, Said and similar critics, the postmodern condition and postmodernity is the abjected 'other' of more noble imperatives. And yet, in a similar way that Bhabha's hybridity is far from a catch all celebration for all that can be remoulded and reshaped for the global consumer, the postmodern, in the poststructuralist sense of the term, emphasises a political aesthetic that is forged from the traces that the hegemonic or global has attempted to efface. In theory, hybridity and loosely formed subjectivities as they appear across fluid spaces and borders, should always be alive to the constructedness and contingencies of their own positions, which are never absolutist in and of themselves. But this is where the dilemma lies and why a debate of this nature still persists. The way agency is forged from within the limits of representation in a postmodern position, leaves it vulnerable to criticism that it simply endorses a celebration of the material, when it should in theory be very politically charged. In cases where liminality is eschewed in favour of the aesthetic or material, it is easy to see how the marginal can become appropriated as a repository of global capitalism, whose apparatus is transnational and ranges from postcolonial literature to advertisements.

Perhaps one of the most interesting interventions on the impact of the global turn was from Jacques Derrida, in one of his final pieces before his death. He finds himself

genuinely disconcerted at having to, in some ways, confront the ethics of his own, painstakingly cultivated poststructuralism: 'forced to obey two apparently antinomical imperatives, I literally do not know what to do'.³¹ He leaves the reader in no doubt, however, as to the impact of globalisation, which 'has become, and the statistics would bear this out, the site of the most symptomatic uses and abuses of our time, especially in the last decade'.³² And yet, in the spirit of the deconstructive practices he perpetuated, Derrida's 'solution' to such a phenomenon involves emphasising the absences in the approaches of those who feel they have all the right answers. These include those that endorse globalisation or radically oppose it, both are warned that 'celebration and demonization often hide interests and strategies that we must learn to detect'.³³ From within the limits of these positions therefore, agency is forged out of 'reinvent[ing] the norm itself, the very language of the norm'.³⁴ It is a politics of suspicion that embraces the aesthetics of the imagination, but also must crucially be alive to 'hidden interests', so that neither a celebration of the effects of the transnational turn or its 'demonization' will serve to short-circuit its ideological framework. Any political response must take into consideration the 'uses and abuses' of globalization as well as its own constructedness and potential contingencies.

One critic who appears to have been somewhat misunderstood in this sense but has nonetheless come to signify literary theory's complicity with the mapping project of global capitalism is the aforementioned Arjun Appadurai. His theorisation on the 'disjuncture' of globalisation and its transnational flows foregrounds empowerment

³¹ Jacques Derrida, 'Globalization, Peace and Cosmopolitanism', in *Literature and Globalization: A Reader*, ed. by Liam Connell and Nicki Marsh (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp.121-131 (p.121).

³² Derrida, p.121.

³³ Derrida, p.121.

³⁴ Derrida, p.123.

rather than enclosure, energised by the imagination of the transnational subject as they negotiate the changes in borders and spaces such processes have created:

This unleashing of the imaginary links the play of pastiche (in some settings) to the terror and coercion of states and their competitors. The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order.³⁵

The reinsertion of those dislocated populations on the fringes of global flows threatens to be complicit with the way they are imagined by global capital as much as how they playfully construct identities through commodities. Appadurai, however, is not oblivious to the complexities associated with such a transnational status:

Thus the central feature of global culture today is the politics of the mutual effort of sameness and difference to cannibalize one another and thereby proclaim their successful hijacking of the twin Enlightenment ideas of the triumphantly universal and resiliently particular.³⁶

The potential of the imagination that global change has activated is also locked in an ideological conflict between spaces and cultures. This can be reconfigured to represent the ‘home’, traditionally the preserve of nation and ‘difference’, and diaspora or the ‘world’. The fissures and gaps in both the global and local, which are by no means mutually exclusive, must be acknowledged in any tenuous migration. Bapsi Sidhwa’s *An American Brat* is an exploration of this unease, and the way the spaces of ‘home’ and global ‘world’ are played out against a specific (gendered) Pakistani context.

³⁵ Arjun Appadurai, ‘Disjuncture and Difference’, in *Literature and Globalization: A Reader*, ed. by Liam Connell and Nicki Marsh (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp.28-36 (p28).

³⁶ Appadurai, 2011, p.36.

‘A strange country amidst strangers’: The Ambiguity of Arrival and Bodily Performance in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *An American Brat*

Although ostensibly an archetypal text about the disconcerting nature of the diasporic journey away from the margins of ‘home’, *An American Brat* is a complicated and divided text, replete with the complex negotiations underpinning the gendered, Pakistani migration westward and beyond. Many have associated Sidhwa’s novel with her own biographical narrative. Mitali Wong and Zia Hasan describe it as ‘a coming-of-age-story, an initiation tale of how America appears to a new arrival- and an exploration of the impact it has on her as she searches for her own identity’, implying that the narrative was inspired by the author’s own ‘immigration’ to the country.³⁷ Niaz Zaman echoes fairly similar sentiments, when she suggests that the text reinforces how ‘Sidhwa’s stay in the States opened up a new milieu’ through which ‘the Indian/Pakistani immigrant’ experience could be expressed and narrated.³⁸ Such observations are somewhat simplistic, however. Not only do they homogenize diasporic literature but they also over-privilege autobiographical readings.

An American Brat, as the title suggests, does not relay the tale of a privileged, highly successful writer’s journey across the great divide, to take up a position at an American University. Instead, the eponymous protagonist is sixteen year old Feroza Ginwalla. The only daughter of a wealthy Parsee family in Lahore, her behaviour has become the subject of much concern for her parents. Set against the austere backdrop

³⁷ Mitali P. Wong and Zia Hasan, *The Fictions of South Asians in North America and the Caribbean: A Critical Study of English Language Works Since 1950* (London: McFarland and Company, 2004), p.79.

³⁸ Niaz Zaman, ‘Old Passions in a New Land: A Critique of Bharati Mukherjee’s “The Management of Grief” and Bapsi Sidhwa’s “Defend Yourself Against Me”’, in *Ideas of Home: Literature of Asian Migration*, ed. by Geoffrey Kain (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997), pp.75-85 (p.81).

of the first stirrings of state Islamization under General Zia, Feroza's mother Zareen feels she is 'becoming more and more backward everyday' (Sidhwa, *An American Brat*, p.2). Perturbed by her conservative behaviour, which she considers to be a direct result of the fundamentalist turn in Pakistan, the perfect antidote for Zareen is to send Feroza to America and Manek, her uncle, who has been studying at MIT for nearly three years. The initially discussed period is 'just three or four months. [...] Travel will broaden her outlook, get this puritanical rubbish out of her head' (Sidhwa, *An American Brat*, p.2). Despite reservations from her close knit family and especially her paternal grandmother, who imagines a foreboding landscape 'pregnant with unspeakable knowledge of the sexual license allowed American girls and the perils of drink and drugs', Feroza makes the journey outward, to the promised land where she is to be cleansed of her pseudo extremist sensibilities (Sidhwa, *An American Brat*, p.24). The initial shock, cultural or otherwise, includes the institutionalised paranoia of the Department of Homeland Security, who are convinced that Feroza's uncle is actually her husband. There are also two horrifying encounters at the YMCA in New York's deprived inner city, where Manek has arranged accommodation. Firstly in the communal bathroom with a drug addict, who enters the ladies only facility and threatens Feroza with sexual aggression. And then in an incident where a woman- feigning to help her in the event of a malfunctioning lift by directing her to the prohibited fire exit- pushes her into the pitch black, seemingly endless, unfolding flight of stairs. With Manek's, at times sinister, guidance, Feroza begins to adapt and flourish in her new geographical space. Three months becomes three years, as she takes a college course in hotel management in Idaho, and then a degree at the University of Denver. Here she meets friends and potential lovers. Jo, a serial shoplifter, promiscuous in almost all aspects of her life, not just her sexual

relationships, exerts a significant influence on her adjustment and emotional development. In between returning home briefly, the denouement sees Feroza fall in love with a fellow Jewish student from whom she buys a car. They become engaged much to the horror of Zareen, who embarks on a mission, not to send her away, as she did at the beginning, but to bring her *back*. Unable to cope with his wilful, potential mother-in-law, David ends the relationship, leaving Feroza to chart a new path in what has, for now in any case, become her adopted diasporic 'home'.

This apparently conventional, diasporic *Bildungsroman*, represents more than just the displacement of traditionally white, middle-class generic tropes of female social and sexual development in a postcolonial Pakistani context. Feroza's spatial dislocation and negotiation of the challenges that her new world adventure poses appear to problematise rather than reinforce a celebratory, 'postmodern' expression of the migrant experience. This ambiguity is immediately conspicuous at the beginning of the narrative, both in the way Feroza's migration occurs and her own perspective of the migratory space on which her diasporic encounter is to be played out. Under close scrutiny her initial displacement is by no means a typical one, where a moment of violence is responsible for a migration from 'home', concrete notions of which are then unhinged by fluid performance of identity, 'learned' in the diasporic space. In these terms, theoretically anyway, postcolonial migration can be viewed as an inevitability in a transnational world of porous borders. Feroza's movement however, is not her own, even as a by-product of violent discontinuity, a necessary precondition of hybrid identity politics according to Bhabha. Her movement is, from the outset, controlled by multiple political interests, the first being by her parents, or more specifically her mother, who wishes to cleanse her of 'the puritanical rubbish' that is beginning to preoccupy her in Pakistan. There are myriad contradictions in this

approach, the most glaring of which is the reinforcement of divisive binary oppositions; colonial essentialisms recycled in a Parsee, postcolonial context. In this sense, America and the West figure as the exotic, the 'other' space where Feroza's fundamentalist fire can be assuaged and she can then return 'home' to her designated 'self', the gendered role of a Parsee daughter and wife. And herein lies another paradox, where the ideological conservatism of the Zia regime, predicated on the surveillance and control of the Pakistani woman's body and sexuality, is mirrored in the gender politics of Feroza's family and community:

'I'll tell you one thing, though.' Cyrus twisted his neck to follow Zareen's restless passage across the room. 'Zia or no Zia. I'd much prefer she stay narrow-minded and decently dressed than go romping about looking fast and loose.' (Sidhwa, *An American Brat*, p.5)

These are Feroza's father's words to his wife as part of their deliberations on whether or not they should send their daughter to America. Cyrus's anxieties are illuminating. He eventually relents and approves of his wife's plan because earlier in the week he had discovered Feroza, seemingly about to start a relationship with a non-Parsee: 'he would not have his daughter fool around with Muslim boys' (Sidhwa, *An American Brat*, p.10). Feroza's parents are not opposed to conservatism per se, as Zareen, in her proto-feminist position suggests, only a specific type of religious conservatism. In the later stages of the novel, all of Zareen's feminist proclivities are subsumed by her determination to 'protect her [Feroza] from the calumny that would destroy her' by marrying the Jewish David (Sidhwa, *An American Brat*, p.310). Anxieties over miscegenation, it seems, have also followed Feroza to the promised land. The point is that this is not supposed to be a journey where spatial mobility leads to the type of disruptive play of identity which disturbs essentialist ideology. There must always be

one totalising framework that Feroza absolutely must not challenge, whether she is 'here' or 'there'. Her journey is prescribed, and associated with a particular kind of 'emancipation'.

Feroza's migratory experience is itself therefore, interpellated, rather than fashioned out of the deconstruction of such an interpellation. Her relationship with America, as the locus of her diasporic 'self' before she leaves and when she arrives, is a necessarily ambiguous one:

Feroza slipped under her quilt fully dressed, her eyes wide open, her mind throbbing with elation. She was going to America! She found it difficult to believe. She repeated it to herself. 'I'm going to America. I'm going to America!' until her doubts slowly ebbed and her certainty, too, caught the rhythm of her happiness. To the land of glossy magazines, of *Bewitched* and *Star Trek*, of rock stars and jeans. (Sidhwa, *An American Brat*, p.21)

Such declarations about the culturally motivated perceptions of Feroza's destination would apparently form the ideal starting point for a dissonant, hybridised identity. An awareness that the reality of the metropolitan centre is fundamentally a mediated one, suggests that it can also be reshaped and remoulded, making it ripe for the insertion of previously marginalised 'others'. This is not the repudiation of reality at all, but the assertion that reality cannot exist beyond its mediation, beyond *Bewitched* or *Star Trek*, a 'hyperreality'. As far as the hybridity of the postcolonial migrant is concerned, survival lies in remaining within the limits of this 'hyperreality', of reformulation and jarring parody within the representation of the cultural forms that mediate the subject's new 'reality'. The problem for Feroza, however, is that she does not possess such a politically nuanced recognition, her entry into the diasporic field being entirely controlled. For her, *Bewitched* and *Star Trek* are America's reality and the myth transcends its material contingencies. Hence, despite the dark experiences highlighted

above, where such contingencies are brutally brought into play, Feroza maintains a strained relationship with her new environment, fluctuating between adulation and alienation:

The liberating anonymity she had discovered within moments of her arrival at Kennedy Airport, when no one had bothered to stare at her and the smoky-eyed American she was talking to, still exhilarated her. In Lahore these contacts would have been noticed and would have drawn censorious comment. Within the heady climate of freedom in America, she felt able to do anything. (Sidhwa, *An American Brat*, p.224)

To return to Uzma Aslam's critique of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* earlier, Feroza's initial optimism appears to reflect the diasporic spirit, which frames the new migratory space an empowering one, full of potential and possibility. She is quickly disabused of these mythical preconceptions however. And the text continues to chart an uneasy path between the enabling pleasures of diasporic movement, as interrogated by Ali, and the contingencies of these pleasures. The precepts of 'The American Dream', as such, are as unproblematically internalised as they are recycled in the various cultural forms Feroza has consumed before and after her arrival. Far from short-circuiting these hegemonic ideologies by consciously inserting herself into their constructed fabric, Feroza is dangerously close to becoming interpellated herself. However, there are a few interesting areas concerning her sexuality as a postcolonial subject, which appear to transcend the cultural construct of 'licentious American' versus 'conservative' Parsi. The 'extraordinary sexual possibilities' Manek and Feroza 'would avail themselves of' (Sidhwa, *An American Brat*, p.116) threaten to inscribe a different kind of sexual freedom:

Occasionally Feroza caught herself imagining those pink bodies, gently tracing the silken curves of the breasts, feeling the soft weight of the flesh in her hands. Sometimes she wanted to hold and be held by those soft bodies [...] (Sidhwa, *An American Brat*, p.156)

The homoerotic play of Feroza's gaze here and the way it manifests itself on her body represents a doubly alienating manoeuvre. She might have the 'freedom' to explore her sexuality and desire in America in such a way. But the hypermasculine and intensely hetero-centric cultural environment, especially against the backdrop of Ronald Reagan's administration, would place ideological brakes on her subversive expressions of sexuality. Given that a very specific racial configuration of heterosexual desire is demanded of Feroza, her queer experimentation remains only imaginary, reinforcing her ambivalent engagement with diasporic arrival.

Hybridity, Agency and Gender- The (Un)making of Feroza?

Criticism on the novel, though rare, focuses on a postmodern reading of diasporic literature. Geoffrey Kain views the text as recreating the American frontier narrative. The difference being, of course, that it is a postcolonial migrant who is this time bestowed with the privilege of exploring the New World's vast spaces:

The power of culture in which she finds herself continues to absorb her, and she proceeds to distance herself from the potency of immediate ties to family and native culture. From one perspective- something of a traditional, mythically American perspective- Feroza's continuity with the archetypal America of independence, individualism, open vista, and energetic improvisation becomes stronger as the novel progresses. *An American Brat* is a tale of continuity. From another perspective, Feroza is almost lost to extended family, to her religion, to modes of traditional behaviour, to native place and culture as she is "swallowed" by the seductive giant of America. *An American Brat* is a tale of rupture. It is a very American Tale.³⁹

³⁹ Geoffrey Kain, 'Rupture as Continuity: Migrant Identity and "Unsettled Perspective"' in Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat*, in *Asian American Literature in the International Context: Readings on Fiction, Poetry and Performance*, vol. 1, ed. by Rocio G. Davis and Sami Ludwig (London: Transaction Publishers, 2002), pp.237-246 (p.244-245).

The problem here is that the geographical ‘rupture’ of Feroza’s migration is invested with a completely different type of geopolitics, a geopolitics which substitutes the dissonance and disruption her border crossings create, with a seamless narrative of ‘continuity’ and self-discovery. Inserting a postcolonial migrant into the hallowed spaces of frontier mythology does not challenge the latter for Kain, making them vulnerable to potential re-inscription. Instead, their ideologies are strengthened, having absorbed the Pakistani ‘other’ into their vast melting pot. America continues to unproblematically represent ‘individualism and independence’, a backdrop that provides ‘an open vista for energetic improvisation’. This leaves little doubt as to how Kain views the country that Feroza has left behind. The transnational flow of people has only brought the ‘other’ closer in so far as it can figure as concretised representation for the exotic, a sign that is indeed taken for wonder. The reality however, is that any refashioning on Feroza’s part occurs *in spite*, rather than because of the two cultural spaces she continuously has to mediate. This is why her ongoing journey is more about a fissured *process* of becoming rather than an effortless initiation into an identity that waits for her on the other side of the frontier. In this respect, Carmen Faymonville is more accurate in her suggestion that ‘[...] a contemporary non-traditional female migrant can fully inherit this particular American myth only when this myth has lost its meaning.’⁴⁰ The problem is that this does not occur in Feroza’s case until she is well into her journey, her perceptions about American ‘reality’ still being shaped by transcendental ideology:

⁴⁰ Carmen Faymonville, ‘South Asian American Women Writers in the Mythical West’, in *Asian American Literature in the International Context: Readings on Fiction, Poetry and Performance*, vol. 1, ed. by Rocio G. Davis and Sami Ludwig (London: Transaction Publishers, 2002), pp.247-261 (p.257).

[...] Sidhwa takes a hard look at the way frontier violence takes a hold of the ethnic self and causes inevitable assimilation. But unlike Jasmine, Feroza finally does not blend in [...] despite the “closing of the frontier”, the West still represents to the “typical” American life- which, arguably, has never been anything but a “Mythical America”.⁴¹

Feroza’s frontier journey involves living the marginalised contingencies of the hegemonic racial, sexual and gendered ideologies she encounters, rather than already being aware of their shaky foundations. In the final analysis, her fate remains in the alienated margins of both ‘home’, where her dalliances with inter-religious marriages has left her a pariah, and ‘away’, where her Jewish fiancée suddenly discovers his spiritual affiliation and also jettisons her:

Her break with David still hurt so much, especially the circumstances surrounding the break. If she flew and fell again, could she pick herself up again? Maybe one day she’d soar to that self-contained place from which there was no falling, if there was such a place. (Sidhwa, *An American Brat*, p.332)

The hybridised identity which Feroza is left with, therefore, is by no means a consciously mediated, performative one. She is fundamentally unsure of how to employ it, if it even exists at all, and its endgame is not a positive nihilism but one that is very unsettling and agonising.

One could argue that, if not Feroza, there are protagonists, chiefly her cousin Manek, who follow the trajectory charted out for the globalised, hybrid migrant. There are two significant factors here. Firstly, Manek’s gender ensures a privileged status for him in both Pakistan and, more significantly, maps out a different, NASA bound path for him in his adopted diasporic home. As a male migrant, his dreams, aspirations and path to agency are delineated in a very specific way. Here is Manek, explaining his reverence to Feroza for all that is American:

⁴¹ Faymonville, p.252.

‘That’s right. That’s what a free and competitive economy in a true democracy demands. That’s why the country is prosperous. That’s why the Third World is so backward and poor.’ (Sidhwa, *An American Brat*, p.126)

This refrain is repeated throughout the novel. ‘Civilisation’ and ‘progress’, as differentiating West from East, are expressed purely in economic terms. The successful initiation of the postcolonial migrant is an initiation into capitalism. And it appears this is the contingency of the hybridised identity that Manek enacts so successfully. Hybridity becomes an adjunct to the transnational flow of people and labour in the service of the undisputed might of American capitalism. To this end, Manek’s journey begins at MIT and ends at NASA, working in an extremely lucrative post. He can effortlessly perform both American and Parsi identities, and benefits from both. Unlike Feroza, he makes the politically expedient choice of returning ‘home’ to be married to a Parsi woman, relaying the Occidental wonders of the ‘American Dream’ to all his relatives. When at work, Feroza is shocked to find that he has adopted, or been given, the name Mike: ‘The people I have to deal with find it hard to remember Manek. It’s too foreign, it makes them uneasy. But I am one of the guys if I’m Mike’ (Sidhwa, *An American Brat*, p.272). Manek’s gender gives him an advantage over Feroza in *both* sets of cultural formations, spaces and ideologies. It appears, therefore, that agency in the globalised, diasporic landscape is determined by a transnational capitalism which is in turn underpinned by patriarchy.

‘To go home really wasn’t an option I felt in any state to exercise’- Kamila Shamsie’s *Kartography*

In Sidhwa’s novel there is a palpable sense of dislocation as far as the female, diasporic migrant’s journey away from ‘home’ is concerned. The realisation that survival through hybridity is merely a precursor to joining global capitalism’s transnational labour flows, as her cousin has, problematises Feroza’s position in the vast American metropolis. What is perhaps most significant in highlighting a common thread between the diasporic space and configuration of ‘home’, in terms of her elision in both, is the way agency is circumscribed by prevailing gendered ideologies. Her status at ‘home’ is now untenable as she represents the spectre of miscegenation, where her transgression threatens to expose time-honoured Parsi taboos of marrying outside the religion for women. The discourse of faith, in this and many other instances, is employed to essentialise what is simply a desire to control female bodies and sexuality. Feroza’s position in the migratory space is arguably no better in the end. Her performance of identity to destabilise racially motivated constructions, like the Parsi daughter/American girlfriend cultural mediation she enacts between her Mother and David, is jarring and effective in some ways. But ultimately, such a route to agency and success in the metropolis is contingent on gender once again, with Manek, the main, *male* beneficiary of the American Dream. As a postcolonial woman, Feroza becomes a repository for the exotic, her transnational romance with David figuring as a means by which the white, middle-class American male can consume difference, and then discard it before moving on to the new pastures that are offered to him as a global consumer, a domestic tourism that does not involve the inconveniences of travel. Feroza’s diasporic experience as a postcolonial migrant and

woman leaves her floating in between the contingencies of both her Pakistani ‘home’ and global (American) world.

In Kamila Shamsie’s *Kartography*, the way the space of ‘home’ is (re)configured and mapped in journeys involving migration and return, both real and imagined, provides one of the main thematic and contextual concerns, with the figurative ‘K’ representing Karachi, Pakistan’s own metropolis.⁴² Those that return to the spaces and borders they once inhabited have a relationship with Karachi that is at once strained and also inexplicably romanticised, seeped in nostalgia. It is along these contours and lines that Shamsie’s characters make their own cartographical inscriptions. Before turning to her novel it would be helpful to explore how the concept of ‘home’ has been theorised in recent postcolonial criticism. Homi Bhabha’s work on the construction of postcolonial identity is seminal to these discourses. In this sense, ‘home’ is the first site of violence and dissonance, where fixity and difference are unable to contain their own contingencies:

“Being home” refers to the place where one lives within the familiar, safe, protected boundaries; “not being home” is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of difference even within oneself. Because the locations acquire meaning and function as sites of personal and historical struggles, they work against the notion of an unproblematic geographic location of home.⁴³

In Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty’s formative essay on the politics of home, the ‘illusion of coherence’ is destabilised by the traces of what is excluded, those ‘specific histories of oppression and resistance’. Migration, it appears, facilitates such an unsettling gaze, where the postcolonial subject’s ‘home’ is scrutinised and the latter’s

⁴² Kamila Shamsie, *Kartography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002). Subsequent references to the novel are within the main body of the thesis in parenthesis and are from this edition.

⁴³ Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, ‘What’s Home Got to Do with It?’ in *Feminist Studies/Cultural Studies*, ed. by Teresa de Lauretis (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp.191-211 (p.188).

ideological work unpacked. It is in these terms that Jopi Nyman claims ‘the task of diaspora is to question the fixedness of identities and conceptions of home and nation, and to show that home is not necessarily a stable issue or a merely positive and empowering state’. ⁴⁴ Migration and diaspora here plot out a root to potential agency and empowerment. Yet it is crucial that such a subversive approach does not claim an essentialist ‘illusion of coherence’ for itself, but take, as its starting point, a liminal position, conscious of its own constructed nature. Postcolonial agency stems from the performance and parody of *all* fixed spaces, be these at ‘home’ or in the diaspora. This emphasis on representation and construction in the (re)imagining of home is explained by Susheila Nasta as ‘a desire to reinvent and rewrite home as much as a desire to come to terms with an exile from it.’ ⁴⁵ Spaces, borders and boundaries are the sites for material interventions by the postcolonial migrant, subject to both construction and (re)construction if desired. ‘Home’ can hence be posited in the in-between spaces and contingencies of such a construction:

The search for home is neither a nostalgic retreat to a familiar past nor a defensive reaction against the brutalities of the present. The meaning of home is now found in the future-orientated projects of constructing a sense of belonging in a context of change and belonging. ⁴⁶

What can be understood by this, where again the influences of Bhabha are clear, is that real ‘belonging’ stems from the recognition that there is no ‘belonging’, at least not as it is expressed through the atavistic concepts of nation or nationhood. These have been exposed for what they exclude, culminating in migration and diaspora.

⁴⁴ Nyman, p.24.

⁴⁵ Susheila Nasta, *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* (London: Palgrave, 2002), p.7.

⁴⁶ Nikos Papastergiadis, *Dialogues on the Diaspora: Essays and Conversations on Cultural Identity* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1998), p.9.

Empowerment lies in imagining shared alliances which cannot afford to make the same mistakes.

There are, however, vital caveats to this approach. It is not entirely unreasonable to suggest such an emphasis on a diasporic sensibility as regards the imagining of 'home' is entirely forged 'over there' as it were. In other words, the dissonant eye itself becomes implicated in a global mapping project, where the discrete exclusions of 'home' once again become subsumed, only this time as a part of pseudo-democratic, transnational way of viewing the world. Such a reconfiguration is facilitated by new technologies, so that it is no longer the imagination which is used to traverse distances, but the internet, which can flatten space and time in a matter of seconds.

Kartography should be read within these debates. Set against a backdrop spanning over thirty years of Pakistani history, from the war with Bangladesh, to the mid-nineties, Shamsie's novel follows the relationship of her two main protagonists, Raheen and Karim as they grow up as best friends in Karachi, separate, and reunite again. The parents of the two children have an intriguing past. Though seemingly best of friends, the fathers 'exchanged' fiancées. Raheen's father Zafar, initially besotted with Maheen, a Bengali woman, succumbs to racial tension and violence during the throes of the East Pakistan War. Unaware that Maheen is present, he makes a racist remark about her to placate a close acquaintance whose son had been killed in the war. At this point, his phlegmatic friend Ali agrees to marry Maheen, and Zafar conversely marries the former's betrothed, Yasmin. The fractious past of their parents threatens to destabilise the uncannily close bond between Raheen and Karim. This is already compromised by geographic distance, with Karim's father moving his family to London as the turmoil and violence in Karachi increases. Over several subsequent

years that elapse, they communicate only sporadically, with Karim becoming increasingly reticent and defensive. When the two reunite in their home city again, the first time Karim has returned since his migration, it becomes clear that he is fully aware of what transpired between their parents, and what Raheen's father, in his eyes, is responsible for. Against a backdrop of discontinuously brutal politics and family discord, the romance implicit in the relationship between the two remains always under construction, a work in progress that surfaces only occasionally.

The main thematic and contextual dialogue Shamsie employs to mediate both the romance narrative and the wider politics of her novel lies in the conflicting, oppositional views that Raheen and Kareem have on maps and mapping, specifically the cartography of Karachi. Raheen's perspective is evident in the opening pages of the text:

The globe spins. Mountain ranges skim my fingers; there is static above the Arabian Sea. Pakistan is split in two, but undivided. This world is out of date. [...] I close my eyes, and wrap my fingers around a diamond shaped bone. I still hear the world spinning. I spin with it, spin into a garden. At dusk. And yes, those are shoulder pads stitched into my shirt. (*Kartography*, p.1)

At this point, Raheen is ready to begin recollecting memories that can only be ordered by virtue of their non-linearity. Her conception of space is rooted in a temporality that is all about representation, and is indeed evoked materially by her, where whole 'mountain ranges', the geographic contours of Karachi, can be traversed by the simple spinning of a 'globe'. Raheen only has to clutch at her 'diamond shaped bone' and Karachi is reconfigured as a space constructed within the preserve of her imagination, a space that can be 'stitched' out of 1980s fashion trends just as well as its sublime, physical geography. Pakistan is 'static' and as such, is ripe for re-inscription. Karim's

map however differs in very significant ways. For him it is a vocation, first forged at his feudal uncle's dinner table, when the children are sent to the overlord's rural farm as it has been decided by their parents that Karachi has become too dangerous. Uncle Asif gives the children his own unique lesson on the geographic history of the country:

'A history lesson', he said, a few seconds later, cutting through me. 'In 1947, East and West Pakistan were created, providing a pair of testicles for the phallus of India.' He had moulded his rice into the subcontinent. (*Kartography*, p.22)

Despite the conspicuous politics of his uncle's parody, Karim's sense of alienation from 'home' is not assuaged. But rather it becomes a defining factor in his migratory movements, across both the local and global. After leaving for London, his travels see him navigate between the former colonial metropolis and Boston, where his mother Maheen now lives after the break down of her marriage. And ironically, the further he remains *away* from home, the sharper his sense of disaffection becomes, which he attempts to negotiate by scientifically categorising the lay of the land, rather than embracing its indeterminacies like Raheen. These cartographical differences, between what is rooted and rootless, the power of naming and the play of the imagination, form an ongoing, bitter dialogue for the two protagonists as they attempt to sketch a path 'home'. Raheen, at university in upstate New York, responds thus to one of Karim's cryptic communications where he sends her a map instead of a letter, satisfied that he is making progress in containing the unwieldy mass of anecdotes and imaginative (re)inscriptions that prevent true knowledge of Karachi and its contours:

The map is what marks you as an ex-pat and not as a Karachiite. People here don't talk in street names. And you never did either. You know that U2 song, 'Where the streets have no name'. That's Karachi's song. Or, at least, the title is. What are the lyrics? Something about love burning down? I don't know Karim. I never thought I'd write you this letter.
(*Kartography*, p.133)

When Karim makes his long awaited return, however, it is immediately evident that the violence and chaos that repelled him before has amplified, and that his way of mapping space to circumvent these may be utterly ineffective.

There is more at stake in this cartographical project than the metaphorical, in terms of the romance conventions that evidently underpin the text. It is not simply a case of a reductive binary opposition either, as J. Edward Mallot appears to suggest, where 'while Raheen continues to delight in the ambiguities of Karachi, Karim seeks some sort of order in maps, or at least some explanations behind the city's rising violence'.⁴⁷ Karim here is clearly the orientalist cartographer, so fresh within the recent history of Pakistan. He represents a desire to name, to fix and to categorise in a way that would enable the epistemologies of the 'other' to be mapped within the colonial gaze. In such a project, the 'ambiguities' also inscribed within the land through personal memory and narrative, are effaced, leaving Karachi a homogenous mass of places rather than discrete spaces. But the valorisation of Raheen's alternative, romanticised landscape is unsettling. In this regard, Rehana Ahmed's intelligent reading of the 'cosmopolitan' fabric of Shamsie's novels raises several pertinent questions:

The cartographer's apparently socially aware outlook is reduced to an elite, personalized view and the storyteller's apparent localization is undermined so that the binary of cartographer and storyteller is revealed as consisting of two, rather similar perspectives on the city space, both of which presuppose privilege and detachment.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ J. Edward Mallot, "'A Land Outside Space, An Expanse Without Distances': Amitav Ghosh, Kamila Shamsie and the Maps of Memory', *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 18 (2007), 261-284 (p.279).

It must be remembered that Raheen's fluid and flexible conception of Karachi's spatial markings, where movement is entirely predicated on the liberal scope of imagination and memory, also produces an essentialist map of its own:

If we had more reliable systems of law and governance, perhaps our friendships would be shallower. But with no one to rely on except one another, Karachiites come together in times of crises with attitudes which suggest that no matter what else we are in our lives- bankers, teachers, hypochondriacs, cynics, Marxists, feudal, vegetarians, divorcees, bigamists, anorexics, dyslexics, sexists,- our real vocation is friendship. (*Kartography*, p.209)

Here, as in numerous other passages, the very real violence and 'crisis' that shape the trauma etched in Karachi's cultural memory and landscape, become eschewed by Raheen's desire to map space in a certain way. Violence, in her cartographical framework, is an intrinsic, immutable part of her city, and its people overcome its dissonant effects on their lives through a shared memory, which produces shared spatial histories, enabling them to move through Karachi by the sheer force of imagination. Indeed, the loose ties of 'friendship' and the 'imagination' become fetish objects in Karachi's romanticised, utopian cartography. The marginalised contingencies that are produced by the destabilising violence are thus ultimately subsumed, figuring as signs that are divested of their political and ideological significance as they comprise the cartographical tapestry Raheen has constructed for herself. 'Marxists' are seamlessly integrated with 'bigamists and divorcees' united by a supposed commonality that writes over their discrete histories and positions in such a complex mapping project.

⁴⁸ Rehana Ahmed, 'Unsettling Cosmopolitanism: Representations of London in Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron*', *World Literature Written in English*, 40.1 (2002), 12-28 (p.21).

It becomes apparent that Raheen's cartography of aesthetics circumscribes as much, if not more than Karim's own desire to fix categorically the home he has become dislocated from. These particular postcolonial sensibilities are rooted in a diasporic migration away from, and the subsequent return to the, postcolonial homeland. Ahmed again makes a compelling argument regarding *Kartography* in this sense:

A deconstruction of the binary of cartographer/storyteller reveals the representation of Karachi as one of elite "cosmopolitanism"- a perspective that fails to engage with the localized realities that constitute the city or with its socio-economic relationship to the global space that surrounds it. As in *Salt and Saffron* [Shamsie's first novel], Karachi is detached from its historical context despite the fact that an abstracted space beyond the city is fundamental to the narrative's plot and to the narrative's perspective on the city.⁴⁹

Raheen and Karim's migratory experiences represent the seamless movement through transnational space of the diasporic subject who is clearly comfortable in their own globalised skin. As Ahmed emphasises, this is conspicuous in the 'abstraction of global space'.⁵⁰ Raheen's journey in particular foregrounds a narrative of comparative harmony for those that are aware of the 'realities' that shape other diasporic movements. There is not even a suggestion of the possibilities of racism, exclusion or inequality as she negotiates her way through university in America with consummate ease. Her hybrid politics are engaged less as a survival tool in her new landscape and more as means to explore what it has to offer. This includes her emergence as a sexual subject. More significantly though, it appears Raheen's identity politics, manifest in her conception of space and movement, are crystallised within the confines of academia. Her refashioning of Calvino's *Invisible Cities* as *Envisionable Cities* (a

⁴⁹ Ahmed, p.22.

⁵⁰ Ahmed, p.14.

pastiche), to mirror the conflicts and contradictions of Karachi, reinforces how the global flows and histories of the 'space beyond Karachi' are indeed an absent presence in the way Raheen, as the returning migrant, attempts to reconfigure her city. The continued 'abstraction' is literal in Karim's case; his early migration and travel between London and Boston are barely described.⁵¹ Instead, their presence is visible in its invisibility. For both protagonists, the return 'home' and the way they reconfigure Karachi's space is predicated on an interpellation in the diasporic location that has been so successful it barely figures in the postcolonial consciousness.

To revisit the beginning of the discussion on Shamsie's novel, her main characters have the 'option to exercise',⁵² be this a return 'home' or a retreat into a global space that has been 'abstract[ed]'. As Ahmed has explained, this is the preserve and privilege of 'an elite "cosmopolitanism"', which can afford, in the literal sense, to marry imagination and movement as it makes its inscriptions on the global map, between 'home' and 'world'. Where the disconnect occurs is when such a sensibility- which in Shamsie's novel can only be 'exercised' by the specific strata of bourgeois, middle-class society that Raheen and Karim are a part of- is superimposed on the rest of Karachi and by extension, Pakistan. In fact, there is a palpable contempt for any epistemology which does not figure in the cosmopolitan gaze's ideological scope. In Karachi, these appear in the form of those ideological frameworks that have historically been opposed to the 'modernisation' the bourgeoisie have called for. Raheen's friend Sonya provides such tension. Having donned the headscarf she begins to observe strict rules of segregation which Raheen is shocked to discover. Sonya is clearly on the margins of her utopian view, and so, by symbolic association, are the significantly large majority of people whose gendered identity is bound with a

⁵¹ Ahmed, p.12.

⁵² Shamsie, p.255.

religious one. The wider populace are airbrushed out of Raheen's reconfiguration of 'home' just as memories are effaced by Karim's name-based mapping project. In the end, the compromise that both characters reach is even more dubious in its apparent claims to inclusivity. The 'interactive map of Karachi', where movement, memory and space are brought even closer together by the internet and its ability to capture and relay specific experiences that Karachiites have with specific places, at a stroke excludes the majority of the city's population (*Kartography*, p.337). Such a project is ultimately dependent on the access the people of the city have to the internet, which to this date, with constant electricity cuts and general poverty, remains very limited. Foregrounding the internet as a potential solution thus reinforces the classist nature of Shamsie's diasporic postcoloniality, and the way it (re)imagines the space of 'home'. The inscriptions her characters make eschew other dissenting identities from their ostensibly apolitical framework. And significantly, it is only the diasporic flâneur- from a specific class and enlightened by their journey across specific transnational flows- that has the privilege to make such fluid markings on their refashioned map of Karachi.

‘A country where self-consciousness was basic survival’- The Contingencies of Space, Transnationalism, and the Imagination in Uzma Aslam Khan’s *Trespassing*

Uzma Aslam Khan’s response to what she views as the privileging of the hyphenated position in the narration of postcolonial experience and epistemology was discussed at the beginning of this Chapter. Hybridity, she feels, has become a precursor to a re-colonisation whose theoretical logic has been forged in the academy, and whose apparatus is the literature of contemporary postcolonial, diasporic authors. The reconfigurations of postcoloniality along lines that are apparently postmodern in these, now hegemonic texts, betray the desires of an imperialism that is now capitalist in scope, facilitated by global technologies enabling its transnational movement and dissemination across borders and spaces. In Shamsie’s novel, Raheen and Karim’s answer to their cartographical dilemma may as well have read thus:

The movements of the multitude designate new space and its journeys [...] establish new residences. Autonomous movement is what defines the place proper to the multitude [...] A new geography is established by the multitude as the productive flow of bodies define new rivers and ports. The cities of the earth will become great deposits of cooperating humanity and locomotives for circulation, temporary residences and networks of the mass distribution of living humanity.⁵³

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s utopian perspectives on the ‘mass distribution of living humanity’ are almost a blueprint for the reconciliation of postcolonial memory, imagination and cartography across technologies that are specifically global and transnational. Whilst Khan’s polemic would clearly repudiate such a claim and place Shamsie and her work as the archetypal exemplar of its scathing criticism, her fiction

⁵³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.397.

is much more complex and nuanced. A brief interrogation of the biographical information available on the author paints an intriguing picture:

I was born in Lahore and grew up mostly in Karachi, though I travelled a lot as a child – two years in Japan, two in the Philippines, three in England. Happily, the travel bug hasn't deserted me. After writing and reading, it's what I love to do the most, and I tend to gravitate to places on the cusp, places that defy easy categorisation. In the photo, I'm on a suspension bridge in Hunza, in the gorgeous Northern Areas of Pakistan. Dave and I found the bridge on our way south from Passu to Gilgit. In case you're in the area, you can also hazard the bridge by following this route. I'm currently living in the most remote group of islands in the world.⁵⁴

Aslam Khan's blog, on the surface, constructs exactly the sort of postcolonial, diasporic subjectivity the author is so vehemently opposed to. Although searching for a biographical self in the work of an author- with all its formative life experiences- is a dubious exercise at best, the emphasis on movement and travel is curious here.

Khan's own narrative thus far has been a cornucopia of migrations that are local and global, internal and external. Lahore, her birthplace, and the fractious, unsettled political landscape of Karachi are both very different cities in Pakistan. With South East Asia and the Far East added to her itinerary, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that a precondition of Khan's fluid, transnational movements may have been economic or class-based privilege. To be fair to her, she does not confirm or deny this. It is more the embracing, or romanticising of liminality that her travelling has offered her, which is interesting. The concept of the much maligned, postcolonial flâneur is brought to mind, as Khan 'gravitates to places on the cusp, places that defy easy categorisation'. To claim that Khan has more in common with Shamsie, also a writer who divides her time between a multiple 'homes' and cities, does not appear so farfetched, therefore. The world is easily traversable for her in a way that is, indeed,

⁵⁴ Uzma Aslam Khan, *About Me*, <<http://uzmaaslamkhan.blogspot.com/>>. 30 September 2009. (Accessed 6 March 2011)

almost Shamsie esque, as she delights in bringing to the reader's attention that she is 'currently living in the most remote group of islands in the world'.

Apparent contradictions between her political and biographical blog aside however, Khan's second novel, *Trespassing*, provides a counterpoint to Shamsie's text in many different ways. Where the two narratives share a common ground however, is once again around the space of Karachi. Issues of gender, national identity, class and sexuality are mediated through an extremely nuanced treatment of postcoloniality and diaspora. The movements of the main protagonists, both to and from the Karachi that is their 'home', shapes their existence and the lives of those around them in various, defining ways. And this is where the two novels differ significantly. In *Trespassing*, Karachi's space is mapped through exclusion and absence. The contingencies of movement in terms of gender, class and sexuality are not subsumed under a transcendental, syncretic identity that claims to represent all, yet effaces far more than it includes in its 'empowering' transnationalism. 'Self-consciousness' indeed pertains more to 'survival', both at 'home' and abroad. In Khan's novel, this strategy is not the focal point of a comfortable cosmopolitanism which embraces material, global culture, but instead more a consciousness of what is produced on the margins of such a performance. In *Trespassing*, there are no utopian solutions to the violence, brutality and instability that pervade Karachi. Instead, it is a politics of the liminal that is stressed, always aware of other marginalised positions. Karachi is mapped from and through these spaces, where the periphery always shifts and the contingencies of nation, gender and class are never singular, but layered and complex.

The nuanced dialogue with theme and context that is continuous in *Trespassing* would demand a narrative of commensurate intricacy. And this is certainly the case.

Khan has chosen to knit together several ostensibly disparate narrative strands, involving different characters. There is no single objective correlative that brings them all together, nor is there a clichéd meditation on how fate has played its inevitable hand. These characters are instead written into each others' spaces because historically they have always been there, on the margins. The interaction these characters share, when their narratives collide, enables an interrogation of the constructions of gender, class and sexuality underpinning their own liminality, and further emphasises how these ideological constructs are germane to each shared relationship and scenario. The main protagonists are Salaamat, Dia, and Daanish, and they are given their own sections. The text oscillates between these third-person sections, and temporality is treated in the same way, with the narrative structure dictated less by linearity and more by the vagaries of memory. It is the recollections and past of each character which telegraphs what they will share in the present and an uncertain future. Dia and Daanish are significant here. The former is a teenage girl who is captivated by her mother's silk business and especially the process of the breeding of moths related to such an endeavour. Dia's imagination is immersed in the historical narrative of silk; from discovery to production, and her life is spent in-between her house and the silk farm. Daanish is a diasporic migrant who returns home for his father's funeral, having spent three years at university in America. They share a passionate and tumultuous relationship. It is clandestine as he is involved in a marital arrangement process with Dia's best friend, for which he has not given his mother a definitive answer, despite her constant reminders during the affair. Dia is also aware of Daanish's predicament and finds it difficult to reconcile her desires for him with her guilt regarding her friend. It emerges, however, that through their parents, they actually share more than an illicit liaison. Dia's mother and Daanish's

father had a relationship in London that continued after both were later married in Karachi. The reader learns through Salaamat- who until that point had only figured in Dia and Daanish's immediate sphere as the driver that ferried them to their meetings- that the lovers may indeed share the same father. At this point Khan's novel appears to form an ironic, somewhat perverse counterpoint to the enabling possibilities represented by the romance between Raheen and Karim in *Kartography*. Dia and Daanish's union in this sense is a gross parody of such possibilities, pervaded from the beginning by ominous portents and an awareness that any type of progress in the relationship will ultimately be destructive. The lovers do become sexually active, under Salaamat's voyeuristic gaze, but this seems almost incidental. The relationship is not curtailed by the spectre of incest, but rather by an inability of the romance it signified to transcend what is at stake. The trace, be this social, political or historical, cannot be effaced.

There is a fundamental difference between *Trespassing* and *Kartography* therefore, in terms of the way the imagination is engaged to envisage space and (re)fashion identity. Perhaps the variance is best exemplified by the very different treatment in the texts of the same, unsettling moment in Karachi's recent history. This concerns an accident involving a bus and a teenage girl, who was killed after being run over. The charting of ethnic tensions in the city is prominent in *Kartography*. The girl was a migrant Muhajir and the bus driver was a Pathan. Yet these details and the complex histories that underpin them are eschewed by Raheen's romantic imaginary, which views the incident as an essential part of Karachi's character, a nature that must be embraced if it is to be loved. Here both girl and bus driver become ciphers and are marginalised in Raheen's bourgeois narrative, where movement through the city is

representational rather than lived. Aslam Khan's novel however, constructs the contours of Karachi in a way that demands different questions:

The bus body-making business was one of the worst hit by the riots that began last year when a Muhajir student was run over by a Pathan bus driver. Members of her community insisted it was deliberate, and yet another way they were being exploited. They torched buses, smashed workshops, killed workers, learned to manoeuvre Soviet and American weapons. As the trouble spread, few remembered the college girl who'd triggered the mayhem by crossing the street at the wrong time on the wrong day.⁵⁵

Ethnic tensions are interrogated in their wider political and social contexts. The incident is not used to fetishise Karachi's endemic propensity for violence, but rather as a starting point to explore the glaring class, national and gender inequalities that has produced such a tenuous situation. The characters in the novel are both implicated in these and at the same time marginalised by its politics. The episode is from a flashback in Salaamat's past, as he leaves his Sindhi home on the outskirts of Karachi, to pursue his dream of painting an archetypal Pakistani bus, hence the focus on the 'body-making business'. Ethnic disturbances are located within the wider, global framework from which they cannot be excluded. In this case, the first Afghan war leading to a mass inflow of refugees to Pakistan, placing pressure on already established Pathan businesses and an embittered Muhajir community, blamed for many of Karachi's economic woes. The flow of people across borders, however, is also accompanied by an equally mass influx of 'Soviet and American weapons'. The distinction between 'good and evil' is not made here, as the teenage girl quickly becomes a casualty of domestic as well as international conflict. Moreover, national identities vying for enunciation and power across the bodies of women are also fresh

⁵⁵ Uzma Aslam Khan, *Trespassing* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), p.241. Subsequent references to the novel are within the main body of the thesis in parenthesis and are from this edition.

in the gendered memory of the country. This historical moment becomes more than a sign enabling easy transnational movement through the space of the city and consumption of its culture. It is also a site of conflict, where marginalisation and inequality is never far from narrative consciousness.

To suggest, however, that a binary is reinforced in the novel between historicity and a performative identity that employs imagination to skilfully efface what history has excluded, is debatable at best. Each of the main characters in the text, to varying degrees, fashions and constructs the city-space around them as a way of mediating the very different lived historical and social realities they respectively find themselves in. Dia, to this end, is able to express a history of silk production through a narrative which enables her to make her own, material intervention in a framework that may have otherwise excluded her. The temporal and the spatial only signify here, therefore, in terms of what they *represent*, which is myth and narrative construction. For Dia, as a young, Pakistani woman a recognition that ‘the best episodes from history were of discovery’ can be an empowering one, a way of moving through space within the limits of a constructed, historical narrative (*Trespassing*, p.10). As she proceeds to explain the accidental discovery of silk in China, however, an element emerges in Dia’s imaginative (re)construction that raises interesting questions:

Or, what if the Empress had even seen further into the future? Seven hundred years after the agony of the Greeks, history repeated itself. Now it was the Bengali and Banarsi [bespoke gold] weavers who suffered. If she’d known how the British would chop off the nimble thumbs that made a resham so fine it would slip through an ear-hole, perhaps the Empress would have trampled over the maggots. Then the subjugated nation’s exchequer would not have been exhausted importing third-rate British silk. (*Trespassing*, p.12)

Imagination and narrative here are not employed at the expense of what lies on the margins of history. The violence underpinning it is interrogated at the same time as it

is being re-inscribed. Whilst Dia may thus effectively re(fashion) space through her imaginative whims, there is a conscious awareness of the limits of her inscriptions. The romance of ancient Chinese Emperors and Empresses barely conceals the colonial violence that eventually defined the history of silk. But perhaps what is more interesting is that Dia herself is not spared such a deconstructive examination. It is evident that she is implicated in the same historical inequalities which have produced the marginalisation that has enabled her imagination to operate in the way it does. Her mother is one of Pakistan's most successful business women through her trade in silk. Her empire, however, is sustained by Salaamat's estranged family, an underclass who oversee her entire production process. The father is even the family's personal cook, and a surrogate father to Dia. Sumbul, Salaamat's sister, provides the most obvious contrast to Dia. At fifteen, she already has several children, a patriarchal pressure that her body is beginning to suffer under. When Dia suggests contraception, Sumbul is incredulous. The privileged, young woman has this choice, Sumbul does not. And she, moreover, has the choice to love, live and imagine liberally because of the toils of those who cannot.

The movement through space of each character therefore, leaves behind a dislocation or trace, from which the text ultimately enunciates its political position. Daanish is significant here in terms of the fact that he is the diasporic individual who returns home. And the transnational border crossing he makes see his position and the liminality of it shift remarkably. In America, his experience is far removed from the comfortable transition exhibited by Raheen and Karim. His alienation as diasporic migrant is rendered in several ways that are by no means mutually exclusive:

Daanish hung up his jacket, bound the knee-length apron, adjusted his cap, and entered the dish room. The kitchen reeked of sweat, bleach stale greens, ranch dressing thrown in

vinaigrette, cheese dumped in orange juice. Wang from China and Nancy from Puerto Rico said hi when he took his place at the sink but no one else bothered. (*Trespassing*, p.27)

America's cultural 'melting pot' is reduced to the pluralist mass of illegal, underpaid and maltreated labour that are on the other side of its benign, capitalist ideology. If the 'American Dream' can be claimed by all, it is clearly not an equality that applies to Daanish. Such institutional marginalisation is manifest in his experiences at university as well, where his intelligent curiosity led him to study journalism. At the time of the first Gulf War, he finds himself dismayed by the ideologically biased reporting. But his attempts to wrestle control of representation are undermined by general ignorance and the racism of his Professors. His social encounters are awkward and uneasy. University certainly is not the playground for the development of his sexuality. He finds himself at the mercy of 'benevolent' women who use him as a commodity, to confirm or deny their perceptions of the 'other' place. Daanish becomes a repository for these girlfriends 'to understand all that is authentic' (*Trespassing*, p.31), a sign for the Orientalist mapping of sexuality and geography. It would certainly appear, therefore, that upon his return 'home', he would be acutely aware of the associations between global capitalism, transnationalism and postcolonial identity. Yet the site of epistemic violence shifts once again, as the locus of patriarchal power rests with the prodigal son returning. His treatment of his mother underlines this, where he views her as an obstacle preventing the homo-social bond he shared with his deceased father. It is his relationship with Dia however, that is most revealing, particularly during one of their encounters in the throes of monsoon season:

He said that ever since leaving his country, three years ago, a tiny rent had formed in the centre of him. 'Right here,' he put her finger in his navel. 'Like a zip unfastening. I wasn't even aware of it till came back. And now I realize the zipper has fallen so low, I'm sort of,

well, divided. I think that's what happened to my father [...] 'You're lucky you've never left home', he continued. 'And I guess I don't want you to. When I speak of America, I take you there. But I want you to stay here. Put crudely,' he kissed her forehead again, 'you zip me up'. (*Trespassing*, p.296)

In a similar manner to how Daanish is objectified to represent 'away', Dia is being employed as an immutable symbol of 'home'. She is a sexual subject only in terms of the meanings that Daanish inscribes on her body. His sense of nationhood, migrant identity and masculinity converges around her gendered body. She *has* to represent a fixed 'home' against a hostile, unsettled diasporic location. To this end, Daanish is as implicated in the capitalist, global mapping project as the people he encounters in diasporic location. His gender enables him to make his choices concerning his relationship with Dia, choices she is deprived of. When he ends their conversation by nonchalantly stating, 'Well, this is hard, you know. So, don't be a stranger', his detached attitude epitomises a transnationalism that divests postcolonial space of any political, social or historical significance, so that it can be homogenised more effectively (*Trespassing*, p.441).

In the final analysis, the shifting margin ultimately rests on the character of Salaamat. In every sense, he is produced as the trace in the movement of the other main characters. His tale begins and ends the novel. The vicious assault he suffers in the opening, when attempting to protect turtle eggs from a drunken thief, is only the first enactment of brutal violence on what becomes an increasingly tortured body. The economic decline of his Sindhi village with the arrival of industrial fishing is the first dislocation he suffers, a by-product of a global capitalism that causes an internal migration. In Karachi, he achieves his dreams of painting a bus, but is once again dehumanised as the 'Ajnabi' [stranger] and finds himself the victim of glaring economic inequality due in no small part to his Sindhi ethnicity. As a 'freedom-

fighter' in a Sindhi splinter group, he finds fulfilment perhaps only in his taboo relationship with Fatah, where he explores his sexuality. He is disillusioned however, when asked to murder Dia's father. Salaamat is no more empowered in the end, working as a driver for an arms dealer and chauffeuring Dia and Daanish. The contours of Karachi's city are mapped through him. He remains on its edges and too often, figures through absence. Salaamat's marginalisation is rooted in class, nation, gender and sexuality. He does not have the privilege to move between the lines of these positions, movement for him brings pain and further exclusion. Khan's novel foregrounds the power of imagination in relation to space, but also does not permit a convenient forgetting of what is at stake. The preconditions of narrative, diaspora, identity, and cartography therefore, indeed, have to remain contingent.

'The contrast pained more because it highlighted the limits of each' ⁵⁶

This Chapter has theorized the diasporic turn in postcolonial literature and its presence in the practice of Pakistani women writers. The significant areas of consideration concerned the effect of gender on the way diaspora was framed across postmodern and materialist approaches in postcolonial studies. The theoretical framework I drew upon included recent work in diaspora studies, but also specifically transnational and globalization theory, and how this has impacted on existing paradigms of postcolonialism. Many of the debates and tensions are familiar, with a strong materialist response against those that view the diasporic turn as enabling. The mediation of the transnational and global, and the possibility of it superseding the

⁵⁶ Khan, *Trespassing*, p.427.

postcolonial in the work of the Pakistani women writers, provides an enlightening area of critical inquiry.

These dialogues find a fascinating repository in the texts I have selected. Sidhwa, in *American Brat*, offers a complex insight into the diasporic experiences of not only a Pakistani migrant, but a Pakistani woman. The subsequent narrative is destabilising, negotiating those aspects of transnationalism that are empowering, but also ones that circumscribe in a very real way, both at 'home' and 'abroad'. Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* proved an interesting case, given the burgeoning prominence of the author in academic and literary postcolonial circles. I found that her attempt to incorporate the Bangladeshi War into the fabric of her narrative was interesting. But any serious discussion of Karachi's political situation and the impact diasporic migration and a return home has on the construction of gendered and national identities, is ultimately subsumed under a romanticism which removes the city from any kind of contingency. It is the image of the global flâneur that remains, whose flexible movement through technological flows empowers them to imagine space in whatever manner they wish. *Trespassing* is diametrically opposed to a diasporic position of this sort. Khan's novel, also set in Karachi, subjects the city's spatial politics to a thoroughly dissonant lens. Movement cannot transcend contingency, and this applies to the diasporic as well as home location. The empowering nature of transnationalism is scrutinised in terms of the specific ideological and historical contexts of Karachi. Both Sidhwa and Khan complicate the neo-imperial dichotomy of the West as progressive and the East as backward for the postcolonial, Pakistani diasporic woman.

All three novels provide diverse examples of the way Pakistani women writers have engaged with the diasporic turn and the questions it has posed. Their

interventions are at once complex and nuanced, and the specific national and gendered histories they speak to emphasise new ways in which discourses of postcoloniality, globalization and diaspora can develop. Khan's novel, however, resonates the broader concerns of this thesis. Agency, whether in a diasporic or nationalist context, has to acknowledge the material violence of, in this instance, Karachi's history. Her novel employs a layered, multiple and non-essential sense of space which ultimately foregrounds the importance of absence and contingency in the enunciation of a transnational, diasporic and feminist postcoloniality.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this thesis, I turn to a quotation from ‘Hoops of Fire’, a short story by Khalida Husain, one of Pakistan’s eminent women writers:

It’s the loneliness beyond that never ends, is limitless, the twilight region of time that spreads and enfolds everything, that each of us has to face alone, yes, each one, in the midst of silent, lifeless pictures or in the shadow of vital, fortunate others. The loneliness of that place is relentless – *it tells you for the first time that you only belong to yourself because you’re separate from everyone else, you are yourself only because the other is separate from you. And that is why, every hour and every moment, you try to close the gaps and distances between yourself and the other, you’re lost in the music of harmony and union, but the music and the ecstatic bond are equally unattainable.*¹ (emphasis mine)

These are the feelings of the author’s main character, a middle-class Pakistani woman who has become detached from her environment, withdrawing into her own increasingly tormented thoughts. The sources of her alienation, as highlighted above, also illuminate the main arguments germane to my project. Nation and gender, as imagined in the work of the writers I have engaged with, and fashioned in wider postcolonial theory, appear irreconcilable. And it is ‘the other’ Husain mentions which effectively makes such a reconciliation ‘unattainable’. It is interesting that the copious advice given to Husain’s protagonist includes ‘thinking about the state of the nation’ and ‘the wretched of the earth’ (‘Hoops of Fire’, p.163). The most intriguing of these is when her friends ‘suggest[s]’ she should ‘start to think about third-world women and connect’ herself ‘with all the backward, deprived, sick nation’ (‘Hoops of Fire’, p.164). Her response is telling: ‘Third World- and am I not answerable to that world, beyond the Third World, that lives within me?’ (p.164). Herein lie the issues

¹ Khalida Husain, ‘Hoops of Fire’, in *Kahani: Short Stories by Pakistani Women*, ed. by Aamer Hussein (London: Saqi, 2005), pp.159-164 (p.162). Subsequent references to the story are within the main body of the thesis in parenthesis and are from this edition.

that I have constantly negotiated throughout my project. They concern the politics of representation within the context of history and the fashioning of a (gendered) memory. Husain's character is burdened by the trauma of whose story is lost in this history. She can 'think about the state of the nation', but her voice is likely to be appropriated by a historically patriarchal expression of nationalism. She is *represented* in this sense, rather than in control of her own representation. Conversely, she may take up the causes of the many women of the 'Third World', or indeed her own country. But she then has to consider the extent to which they become lost in her representation of their concerns. The question is, and remains one of, contingency. The aim of this thesis is not so much to highlight how nation and gender are diametrically opposed in the work of these writers, but instead to explore feminist agency and its contingencies and limits against a backdrop of changing histories and nationalisms in Pakistan.

The opening Chapters, therefore, confront postcolonial theory and the way gender figures in its formative frameworks. This was necessary, I felt, to establish a theoretical context. The driving concern was why complex texts such as the work of the Pakistani writers I was researching, could not be so easily accommodated, within what had become hegemonies in their own right. There were additional concerns, however. The sites of exclusion and indeed elision were myriad. The work of these women figures as 'discontents' not only in the context of postcolonial and feminist methodologies, but also more immediately, in Pakistan's own nationalist history. The question of agency in these texts demands a re-evaluation as to how it is theorised, a re-think which is aware of the specific political, historical and social contexts nationalism and gender are narrated against in Pakistan. The aim of this thesis has been to engage with these unique and complex works in a way which facilitates this.

From the outset, my project posed some significant problems. The writing itself threatened to become lost under the weight of the postcolonial, theoretical debate. However, my aim was never to jettison these frameworks altogether. Their applicability to the texts in question necessitated a shift in focus, where the writing itself was the starting point for exploring questions of nation and gender, rather than vice versa. What emerges is a different perspective on conflict and contradiction within the work of these writers; a perspective that does not eschew or appropriate, but couches indeterminacy and aporia in the context of nationalism and the feminist responses to it, as these unfolded in Pakistan.

In Chapter two, I use the work of Bapsi Sidhwa and Farkhanda Lodhi to explore one of these seminal nationalist contexts, the Partitioning of the Indian sub-continent and subsequent ‘creation’ of Pakistan. The way this event played out, and the implication of nationalist/communal ideologies in the ensuing violence, presented a significant challenge as to how it was to be framed in terms of feminist agency. This complexity is apparent in the work of the two writers, whose narratives stand almost half a century apart. In this respect, Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy Man* charts an uneasy path, as her novels tend to, between an investment in a syncretic nationalism on the one hand, and violence against the female body on the other. In the end, her Ayah’s body, as it resonates the brutal effacement of other lost women, strikes dissonance in any romantic notions of primordial national unity in India. Lodhi’s ‘Parbati’ however, recognises this contingency throughout, and reinforces the limits of imagining agency. In Chapter three, I turn to Qaisra Shahraz’s *The Holy Woman* and the use of conventional romance tropes to narrate subversive opposition. This cannot simply be viewed as an expression of postcolonial agency through postmodern feminism. Such an intervention instead illuminates a period in Pakistan’s history of both institutional

violence against women, and an increasingly intelligent feminist activism. It is a constant awareness of what is marginalised that makes the subversion in Shahraz's novel so effective. My final Chapter, engaging with the transnational turn in Pakistani literature through three very different writers in Kamila Shamsie, Bapsi Sidhwa and Uzma Aslam Khan, consolidates my arguments. Terms commensurate with this 'shift', such as diaspora and globalisation, appear to have been superimposed on the Pakistani postcolonial literary landscape. And this reveals a complex relationship between flows of capital, migration and how agency is theorised through these. The writers I have chosen each respond differently to these challenges. Space, movement and their impact on gender are imagined with a sensitivity to contingency in Sidhwa's *An American Brat*, and especially Khan's *Trespassing*, that is patently lacking in Shamsie's *Kartography*.

If there is one conclusion to be drawn from the inquiries this project has undertaken, it is located in the initial, difficult question of how agency is to be theorised and understood in the work of these Pakistani writers. I hope to have emphasised how, through the complexity and dissonance in their work, agency is located in a recognition of absence rather than imagined or claimed from a point of presence. The gendered history of Pakistan is simply too fraught for an enabling, feminist position to be claimed without an awareness and acknowledgement of its discontents. This is what I believe the narratives of these women are a testimony to, in many ways. And most significantly, it is an approach that points to a re-think of how postcolonialism theorises the relationship between nation and gender in the future.

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